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ABSTRACT

This Kids Count data book examines statewide trends in the well-being of Texas' African American children. The statistical portrait is based on ten general areas of children's well being: (1) low birth weight babies; (2) prenatal care; (3) infant mortality; (4) child deaths; (5) births to single teens; (6) juvenile violent crime arrest rate; (7) teen violent deaths; (8) dropout rate; (9) fourth grade math performance; and (10) fourth grade reading performance. Following an introduction, section one of the report presents an overview of research findings including: rapid growth in child population; increased child poverty; family structure as a predictor of child poverty; descriptions of children in poverty and the working poor; and consequences of poverty. This section also presents descriptions of the indicators, and definitions and data explanations. The report's second section consists of indicator maps for the state as a whole. The third section and bulk of the report provides data, by county, on the key indicators for the years 1985, 1991, 1992, and 1994, including percent change over time. The report's final section provides tables, by indicator, of individual county rankings. (SD)

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African American Children in Texas

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texas kids count

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A Special Report of the Texas Kids Count Project

A PROJECT OF THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

African American Children in Texas is a publication of the Texas Kids Count Project.

Texas Kids Count is a project of the Center for Public Policy Priorities with the University of Texas Center for Social Work Research as a research partner. The project is part of a nationwide effort to highlight the well-being of children in every state. As part of this ongoing effort to build a better understanding of the conditions facing all children in Texas, Texas Kids Count is building a comprehensive database of indicators of child well-being. The data will be used to produce annual fact books and other analyses on the status of children in Texas.

Core funding for Texas Kids Count is provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and supplemented by support from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and the RGK Foundation. Special research is also supported by the Texas Department of Health, the Texas Department of Human Services, and the Children's Trust Fund of Texas.

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African American Children in Texas

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African American Children in Texas

The Center for Public Policy Priorities

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a public policy research and analysis organization, seeking sound solutions to the challenges faced by low- and moderate-income families in Texas. The Center pursues this goal through independent research, analysis, policy development, public education, and technical assistance. The Center for Public Policy Priorities is an office of the Benedictine Resource Center.

The Benedictine Resource Center

The Benedictine Resource Center (BRC) is a not-for profit corporation dedicated to promoting the well-being and empowerment of the poor and disenfranchised. In 1985, a congregation of Benedictine nuns from Boerne, Texas founded the BRC. The Benedictine tenet of societal discernment — the ongoing process of reading the "signs of the times" and responding to them — is focal to the BRC's Ministry. Through education, technical assistance, advocacy, research and resource development, the BRC creates strategies for ringing about those structure which promote individual dignity, spiritual enrichment and community well-being — interdependent and essential components of its comprehensive mission. The Texas Kids Count project is a direct outgrowth of the BRC mission to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and families in Texas. The dedication of BRC to this fundamental goal undergirds the Texas Kids Count project and all the activities of the Center for Public Policy Priorities.

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Note from Richard Orton (Photographer)

Many of the photographs in this report were taken over a nine year period in County Line (also known as the Upshaw Community) located in Nacogdoches County. County Line was founded in the 1870's by three brothers - Guss, Felix, and Jim Upshaw - each of whom bought land near the Angelina River near Douglass, Texas after acquiring freedom from slavery.

Land ownership and hard work created a level of self-determination and independence not available to all African American families shortly after the Emancipation. Raising animals and farming put food on the table. Selling fish and firewood provided cash in the early days. According to Monel Upshaw, one of two surviving children of Guss and Ella Upshaw, some of the land was paid off by selling fire wood at 50 cents a cord and fish at 5-6 cents a pound.

The community's population increased to around 200 after World War II. Most of the farming done in the community was done before the war. After the war more people worked in factories and sawmills. According to Mr. Upshaw the best times in the community were from 1945 to 1960. After that the younger people began moving away.

The County Line Baptist Church, established in 1896, is the community's primary cultural institution. The current building dates from the late 30's or early 40's and has undergone numerous renovations. County Line also had its own school from the 1890's until 1963, when area schools were consolidated.

Each year in August, County Line holds a homecoming, which attracts hundreds of people descended from the original families, including many who were born in the community but live elsewhere across the United States. The community remains a strong attraction for many people who were born there or whose elders were raised there. For these people County Line is what they think of when they think of home. Some of them have moved back to the community.

One of my reasons for returning to County Line so many times was not simply to make more photographs, but to learn more about this community created by newly emancipated African Americans. I wanted to know if growing up in such a community made any difference in the lives of their children and grandchildren. What I have absorbed in County Line over the years has added depth to my understanding of the words 'family' and 'community.' This rural community - with its church at the center and its large, extended families arranged around it - has an inner strength not visible to the casual observer, a strength evident in the healthy, productive lives of the men, women, and children fortunate enough to call County Line home. Although I once assumed that the community of County Line was unique, I have come to understand that many such communities exist throughout the South.

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ARC of Texas
Any Baby Can
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Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
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African American Children in Texas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An African American child is born into a family, a community, and a culture with a shared heritage of slavery, the struggle of the civil rights movement, and the historical and contemporary effects of institutionalized racism. Many African American children are born to parents who have struggled with and, to varying degrees, succeeded in an inequitable society. These shared challenges have united African American communities and provided valuable role models that strengthen African American children.

> Although many African Americans have since become successful leaders, professionals, entrepreneurs and politicians, the struggle for equity on all levels continues....However, African Americans have accepted the challenge in their continued struggle for social, economic, and political equality.

While many African American children in Texas are living in safe, nurturing environments, far too many are faced with challenges and consequences resulting from poverty and racism. According to a recent report by Columbia University, nearly 7 out of every 10 African American children in the nation under the age of 6 live at or near poverty.[2] In Texas, approximately 273,400 African American children were found to live in poverty according to the 1990 U.S. Census (39.3%). Many more are living near the poverty line and face many of the same risks that children in poverty face. With so many African American children living at or near poverty, any discussion of their well-being must address, as a core issue, the inevitable consequences of living in poverty and near poverty conditions. The consequences of environmental poverty and racism play a key role in the development of African American children's health, education, family, and community.

Parental employment does not necessarily protect African American children from poverty. Even with at least one parent working full-time, twelve percent of all poor families in Texas are not able to make enough money to lift themselves out of poverty.[3] Children growing up in working poor families face many of the same risks that poor children face. Twelve percent of all Texas children in poverty grow up in families where at least one parent works full-time, but the total family income is still below the poverty line.[4] One in five of all working poor families are African American.[5] Clearly, African American families are over-represented among the working poor. Many more children are living near poverty with one or both parents working in low-wage jobs, many with no health insurance benefits.

Consequences of low economic status

Children living at or near poverty, regardless of ethnic background, are faced with similar challenges and risks. The consequences of low economic status for children are numerous and can be damaging to a child's emotional,

physical, and intellectual well-being. Children growing up in families with low economic status are more likely to:[6]

- have no health insurance
- lack full immunization
- have health problems
- go to school hungry and unprepared to learn
- attend the worst schools
- live in unsafe neighborhoods.

Teens living at or near poverty are more likely to:

- drop out of school
- receive inadequate training to enter today's more technical workplace
- become teen parents
- be unemployed or underemployed, and
- become the victims and/or perpetrators of criminal activities.

Cycle of Poverty

These consequences of low economic status are cumulative and self-perpetuating. Economic status, and in particular poverty, is the best predictor of many of the negative outcomes faced by African American children and their families. The cumulative effects of poverty over time build together to adversely impact the ability of children and families to improve their lives, thus forming a cycle that both causes its own continuation and inhibits escape.[7]

The consequences of poverty and near poverty conditions to the health, education, and future of African American children create a damaging cycle that is difficult to counteract. For example, children living in poor neighborhoods often go to the worst schools. Low educational attainment can lead to children dropping out of school. If they do finish school, they are less likely to go on to college. As adults, they are more likely to be either unemployed or have low-wage jobs. The cycle of poverty continues.

African American children must face the additional challenge of racial discrimination, which has a long historical background in this country. The effects of racial discrimination on the school experience, employment, housing, and interactions with the justice system further perpetuate negative outcomes for these children.

Despite lack of opportunity and multiple stressors on families, thousands of African American families living at or near poverty are able to provide good homes for their children. Many children who grow up in poverty are happy and successful in school and grow up to be productive members of society. Positive factors that contribute to this success are strong family and community connections. In many African American families, an active spiritual influence plays an important role in successful families. Intervention programs and social services designed to help at-risk children and their families also help improve the lives of many African American children. Several of these programs are highlighted in this report.

Prevention and intervention efforts have already led to improvements in the status of African American children in Texas. For instance:

- More African American mothers are receiving prenatal care, thus improving their babies' chances of thriving. The portion of African American mothers receiving little or no prenatal care fell from 11.7 percent in 1992 to 7.2 percent in 1994 (compared to 5.9% for all mothers).
- Infant mortality decreased among African American babies between 1992 and 1994 (from 14.2 to 12.5 deaths per 1,000 births).
- Estimated longitudinal dropout rates for African Americans decreased by 2 percent between 1992-93 and 93-94 from 19.9% to 17.8%.
- Although overall, substance abuse has increased among African American children, the use of inhalants, tobacco, and alcohol is lower for African American youth than for other ethnic groups.

These statistics are encouraging; however, in many other indicators African American children are at greater risk than other ethnic groups. As mentioned before, a high percentage of African American children live in poverty and any child who lives in poverty is more likely to be in poorer health than those children who come from families with sufficient financial resources. Poverty is also linked to early childbearing and lack of prenatal care.[8] Lack of health insurance and adequate access to health care substantially increases the risks for children. These barriers can lead to a higher incidence of low birthweight babies, infant mortality, child and teen disease and death, and low educational attainment. In the African American community, these indicators are all much higher than for other groups. Negative outcomes for African American children include:

- Thirty-nine percent of African American children live in poverty (according to the 1990 Census). Many more live near poverty and face many of the same risks as those in poverty.
- Even though more African American mothers are receiving prenatal care, the number of African American mothers having low birth weight babies jumped from 10.6 to 12.8 between 1992 and 1994.
- African American children are dying at a high rate (46 out of every 100,000 African American children aged 1-14 died in 1994). The leading causes of death are accidents, malignant neoplasms, and homicide.
- Many African American teens are giving birth out of wedlock (22.1% of all African American teens in 1994).
- More than half of all cases of HIV infection among teens are African American (53% during the period of 1994 to 1996)
- Many African American teens are dying a violent death (117.8 per 100,000 African American teens aged 15 to 19 in 1994).
- Too many African American youth are involved in the juvenile justice system. In 1994, 427 youths per 100,000 were arrested for violent crimes.

A safety net of social services helps protect many African American children from the worst effects of poverty. However, recent policy changes such as welfare reform threaten to diminish social support programs and push even more children into poverty and other risky situations.[9] "Social services are vital support mechanisms for helping children develop physically, emotionally, and intellectually into successful, productive adults. Programs and services that lead to school readiness, healthy children, and stable nurturing families can prevent astronomical future costs for special education, health care, crime prevention and prisons."[10] Basic assistance and prevention programs will need to be combined with renewed community involvement to be truly effective.

This report is the result of research aimed at profiling the status of African American children in Texas. It draws on both statistical and interview data to identify the issues that are important in the African American community and to recommend ways to improve the lives of children. There is a growing belief among African Americans that the lives of children can be improved by empowering the African American community, building local businesses, improving education, and strengthening the family. It takes a strong community with a sound economy to provide the support necessary to help families prepare their children for adulthood.

The African American historical experience has provided strong role models, but also has contributed to many adversities faced by African American children today. In the face of these challenges, the African American community has shown growing strength. The civil rights movement of the 1960s demonstrated the power of the African American leaders to effect necessary social change. A similar leadership and community involvement may be needed to reverse current negative trends.

The problems, concerns, and strengths seen in the African American community are complex and interrelated. This complexity can perhaps explain why problems persist despite excellent programs for children in place across the state. There is no simple solution that will improve the well-being of African

American children. Rather, a multi-faceted approach involving community partnerships between all the relevant players at the community, state, and federal levels is necessary.

INTRODUCTION

The Texas Kids Count Project is part of a nationwide effort to build a better understanding of the conditions affecting the well-being of children. This report is dedicated to those who wish to better understand the unique history and circumstances of African American children in Texas. It is designed to inform and support the efforts of community service providers and others working toward improving the lives of these children. It also provides information for local, state, and federal policymakers about the conditions facing Texas' African American children.

Through interviews, focus groups, data collection from service agencies, and an extensive literature review, researchers have compiled information on the health, education, and socioeconomic conditions affecting African American children in Texas. Additionally, this report discusses ways in which local and state agencies are dealing with the issues raised by this research. Included in this discussion are descriptions of selected programs for children.

Three primary sources of data informed this report. First, each topic of the report includes the results of a review of both state and national research of issues affecting African American children. Second, the analysis of each topic area draws on data from numerous state and federal agencies, including the Texas Department of Health, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Department of Human Services, the Texas Employment Commission, and the United States Census Bureau. Finally, focus groups and individual interviews in both rural and urban communities across Texas provide valuable information about the status of African American children and families at the community level. Focus groups and interview participants included community leaders, service providers, and other policymakers from San Antonio, Houston, Nacogdoches, Hempstead, Prairie View, and Bellville.

This report contains descriptions of innovative programs for children in Texas. While there are many high quality programs to help African American children, we could not describe all of them in this report. Therefore, a select few have been profiled as examples of the types of innovative initiatives in Texas.

FINDINGS

The following pages present the findings of this research, grouped under several topic areas including economic status, education, health, and families. The results of the literature review and data analysis are combined with quotes from community members, who were interviewed individually and in focus groups.

Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups

The issues mentioned most often in interviews and focus group meetings are reported here. In rural areas in Texas, the issues mentioned most often during interviews and focus groups as being most important for African American children included:

- lack of preventive health care
- lack of job opportunities
- transportation problems
- lack of social services programs and resources
- lack of parental supervision
- racial discrimination
- lack of role models
- lack of summer/after-school programs

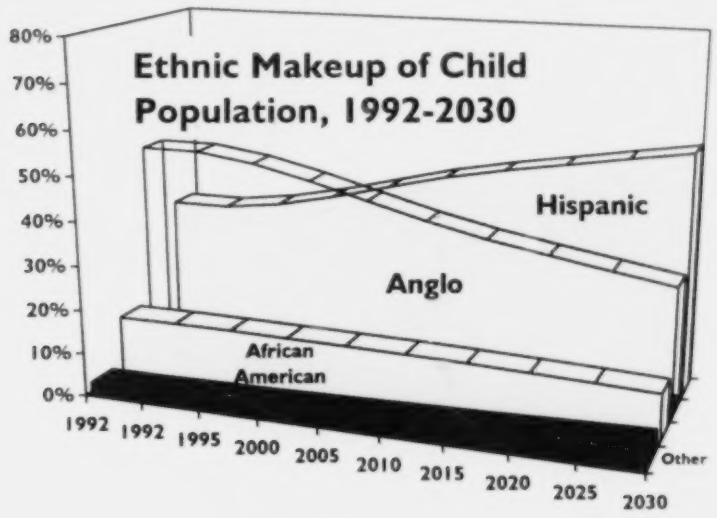
In urban areas, community members emphasized the following:

- poverty
- lack of access to social resources
- problems in the educational system
- problems with the welfare system
- moving away from traditional family structures
- lack of health care
- violence and drugs
- parental neglect
- hopelessness
- politicians who are less connected with communities

Although there are some issues common to both rural and urban areas, rural community members tended to emphasize lack of resources such as social services, jobs, health care, and transportation. Urban residents mentioned lack of resources as well, but also emphasized safety issues as well as problems with education and family.

POPULATION

In 1994, African Americans comprised an estimated 11.7 percent of the total Texas population and 13.1 percent of the child population. Projections regarding the child population in Texas show that the percentage of African American children is declining slowly. According to the Texas State Data Center, the Anglo American population will increase by 20.4 percent between 1990 and 2030, the African American population will increase by 62 percent, the Hispanic population by 257.6 percent and the other population by 648.4 percent .[11]



Children in poverty are the fastest growing segment of the total population, making child poverty a problem that affects a huge and growing number of children.

Source: Texas State Data Center

Table 1: 1994 Child Population Estimates for Texas

	Total	Proportion
Anglo	2,622,768	49.9%
African American	695,590	13.1%
Hispanic	1,864,995	35.1%
Other	124,856	2.4%
Total	18,378,185	100%*

Source: Texas State Data Center, Texas A&M University.

*Percents may not add to 100% because of rounding.

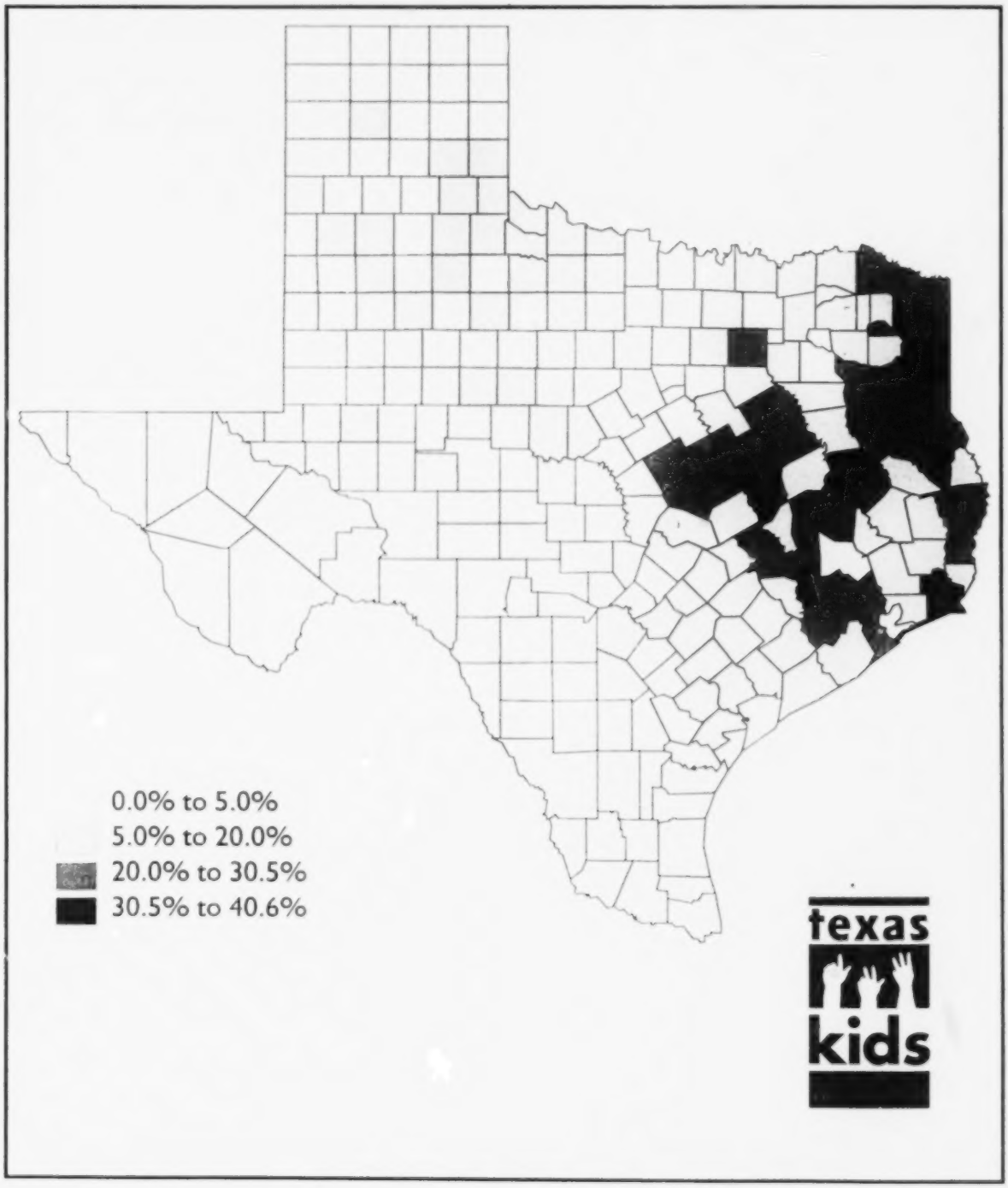
Population estimates for 1994 show that the ten counties in Texas with the largest proportions of African American children range from Marion County, where African American children represent 40.6 percent of the child population, to Bowie County, with 29.0 percent. The ten counties with the largest numbers of African American children differ somewhat from this list, with Harris County having the largest number of African American children (185,729).

Table 2: Texas Counties with Largest Numbers and Proportions of African American Children in 1994

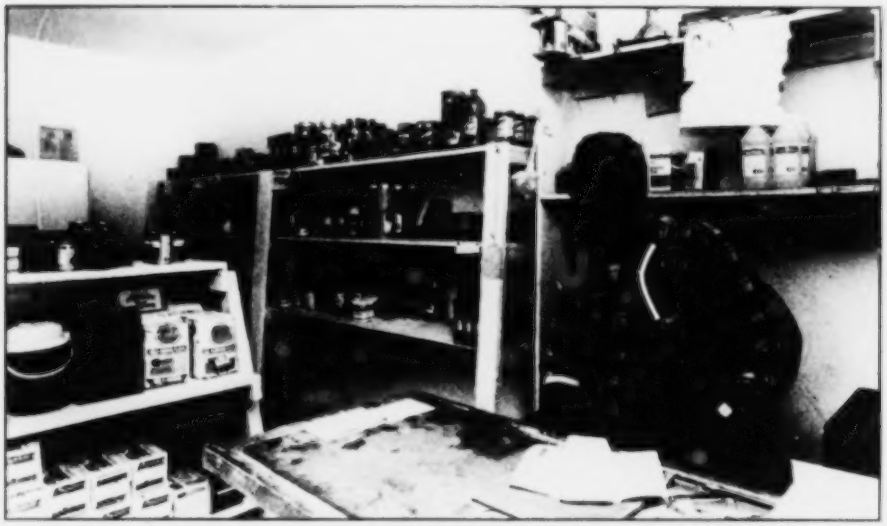
Counties with Largest Numbers of African American Children	Number of African American Children (0-17 yrs)	Percentage of Child Population that is African American	Counties with Largest Proportion of African American Children	Number of African American Children (0-17 yrs)	Percentage of Child Population that is African American
Harris	185,729	27.7%	Marion	966	40.6%
Dallas	127,676	23.1%	San Augustine	773	39.9%
Tarrant	50,157	14.2%	Jefferson	25,549	38.8%
Bexar	26,586	7.1%	Houston	2,014	37.3%
Jefferson	25,549	38.8%	Robertson	1,538	34.4%
Travis	21,825	13.0%	Falls	21,825	33.1%
Fort Bend	20,335	23.3%	Harrison	5,009	31.6%
Bell	15,946	23.5%	Morris	15,946	31.5%
Galveston	13,419	20.7%	Waller	2,112	30.8%
McLennan	10,746	20.1%	Bowie	6,454	29.0%

Source: Texas State Data Center

African American Children in Texas (percent of population by county)



ECONOMIC STATUS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN



The effects of poverty are central to a discussion of the status and well-being of African American children in Texas today. Because of a combination of declining real earnings and rising levels of unemployment, many more African American children live in families that are in or near poverty. A recent study from Columbia University shows that in some Texas communities more than 70 percent of minority children under age 6 live at or near poverty.[12] In Texas, approximately 273,400 African American children were found to live in poverty according to the 1990 U.S. Census (39.3%).

With so many African American children living in or near poverty, any discussion of their well-being must address, as a core issue, the inevitable consequences of living in poverty and near poverty conditions. Poverty and racism play key roles in influencing African American children's well-being, their family, and their community.

Texas has a large proportion of working poor families — families with an adult who is employed for at least 50 weeks out of the year, but the household

income is still below the poverty line.[13] In 1993, 12 percent of all children in Texas were from working poor families while, during the same year, 7.6 percent of all U.S. children lived in such families. One in five of all working poor families are African American (19%) compared to 24 percent for Anglo and 55 percent for Hispanic families.[14] Texas has the third highest rate of working poor in the nation, lower only than the rates of Mississippi and Louisiana.[15]

> Poor children growing up in working households face many of the same risks that poor kids in general confront. Like the children of welfare families, the children of the working poor are less likely to be fully immunized; less likely to enter school ready to learn; and far more likely to experience academic failure and to drop out. As teens, they are more liable to delinquency and pregnancy; if they do graduate, they are less likely to go to college; and finally, like other poor kids, they face a reduced chance of being economically successful as adults.[16]

Impoverished economic conditions in the home, neighborhood, and school environments can have damaging effects on a child's emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being.[17] High poverty neighborhoods have much higher proportions of unmarried mothers, single-parent families, and unemployed young men. There are fewer good role models for young people and criminal activity is more prevalent. "Not surprisingly, with little economic activity, few public and social services, limited recreational and youth development programs, and high levels of crime, adolescents lose hope and often cannot use the few opportunities that are available."[18]

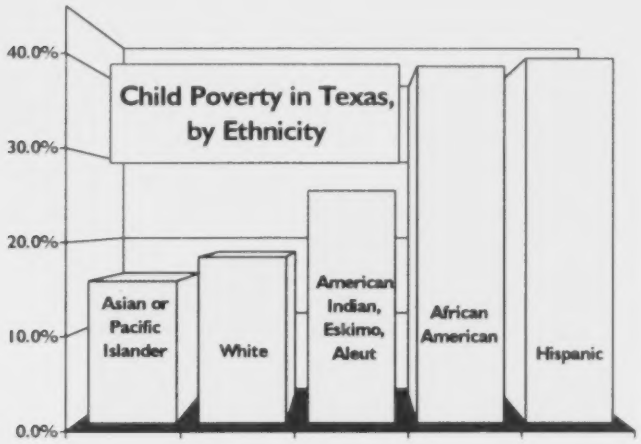
Some communities in Texas, both in rural and urban areas, have become pockets of African American poverty. In such areas, resources for families and children may be particularly lacking, making it difficult for children and families to lift themselves out of poverty. This lack of resources also constructs barriers to a community's revitalization as a whole and is marked by limited employment options, a lack of accessible training and alternative education programs, limited

or non-existent business growth, poor housing, and limited health and human services.

Addressing poverty remains one of the largest challenges for the African American community. Many of the community groups and service providers interviewed for this report believe that it is important to build the economic capacity of communities to combat the effects of poverty. Lower educational attainment, racial discrimination, and the high proportion of single-parent families have been identified as contributing factors to the high percentage of African American poor and working poor families.[19] Because poverty has so many components, service providers and community members stress that efforts to combat it must emanate from many directions.

African American Children in Poverty in Texas

A larger portion of African American children suffer from economic disadvantage than any other group of Texas children. Based on U.S. Census figures for 1990, 24 percent of all Texas children were living in poverty[20], while nearly 40 percent of African American children were living below the poverty line.



According to the 1990 U.S. Census, 40 percent of African American children live below the poverty level.

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

Persistent poverty can be experienced by entire communities. The problems of poverty are cumulative, and often lead to discriminatory barriers to resources. Community member focus groups discussed the problems poverty create in their communities. One health care provider mentioned the difficulties poor African American children experience in gaining needed resources from the community.

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> One of the biggest problems in our community is that we are low-income, poverty-stricken, and we lack access to resources of our society. Most African American children in Houston fall in or near the poverty level as a result of limited resources in the community and they are not able to receive such minimal benefits of society from transportation to health issues. Economics affects all that. (Health Care Manager, Houston, September 27, 1995)

Of the many factors contributing to the existence of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and a lack of community investment all contribute to the maintenance of impoverished conditions within families and communities.

Employment

Employment in the African American community is influenced by racial, economic, cultural, social, and psychological forces. Racial bias indicators such as discrimination and exploitation in society are factors that significantly impact employment by limiting or eliminating opportunities for African Americans.

While children with one or both parents unemployed are more likely to grow up in poverty than children with both parents working, employment does not necessarily protect families and children from poverty. Many working families have very low incomes because they are underemployed or employed in low-income occupations.[21] It is the children from these working poor families who increasingly feel the burdens of poverty.

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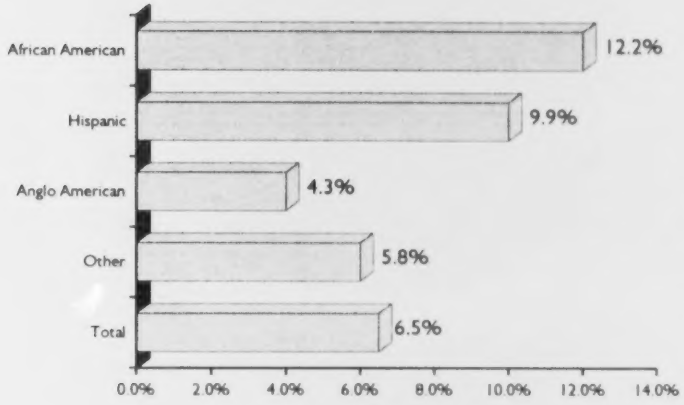
Texas Unemployment Rates, 1995



In 1995, the unemployment rate was twice as high for African Americans as for the total population.

A combination of barriers exist that make it difficult for children to become fully employed adults. Inequitable school funding, a lack of training and employment opportunities, lack of adequate health care, child care, and transportation services, each of these combine to create significant barriers to the resources that help children succeed.

> ... minorities and low-income groups are faced with major institutional obstacles to income and occupational mobility even before they reach adulthood...Only by recognizing the connection between the ecological and educational environment in which a child is raised and the productivity characteristics that he or she possesses as an adult worker can we expect to understand occupational and income determination.[22]

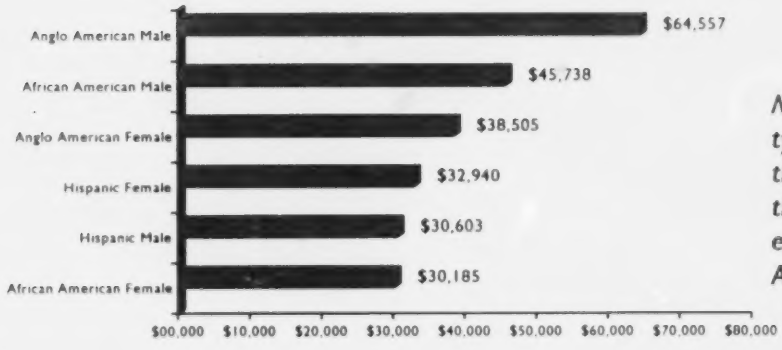
Unemployment figures also often hide the aggregate effects of poverty and poor economic conditions in a community. Official unemployment rates do not include "discouraged workers" or the "hidden unemployed" — those who become so frustrated in searching for work that they give up hope of ever finding a job at all.[23] These frustrated workers are not included in unemployment statistics. Yet, despite the incomplete nature of official unemployment figures,

the statistics are grim: twelve percent of all African Americans in Texas were unemployed in January, 1995, a rate nearly twice the total unemployment rate in Texas. This compares with 10 percent for Hispanics, 4 percent for Anglo Americans, and 6 percent for other ethnic groups.[24]

Gender and Wage Differences

Gender- and race-based wage differences contribute to the existence of the African American working poor population in Texas. An evaluation by the Tomás Rivera Center of private-sector managers between the ages of 40 and 44[25] found significant disparities both between and within ethnic and gender groups. Anglo men continue to earn more than Anglo women. Anglo men and women earn more than men and women in African American and Mexican American ethnic groups. In fact, minority groups typically earn less than 70 percent of the amount earned by Anglo American males.[26] Study results show that female African American managers earn $34,372 less and African American males earn $18,819 less than their Anglo American male counterparts.[27] Female African American managers earned less than managers of any gender or ethnic group studied.

Mean Annual Income of
College-Educated Private Sector Managers,
1995 (Ages 40-44)



Minority groups typically earn less than 70 percent of the amount earned by Anglo American males.

The Tomás Rivera Center study concluded that these wage differences still existed despite affirmative action policies in place to provide equal access to employment for African Americans and other minority groups. The report concludes that it is too soon to end affirmative action programs because disparities in employment and wages still persist.[28]

Job Training

Job training can play a significant role in the ability of poor families to exit poverty. Unfortunately, there are often inadequate job training resources in poor communities. Focus group participants identified a need for more community-based jobs and businesses, as well as more job training funds in their communities.

> The job training funds are decreasing and we have such a high unemployment rate. The only way we can get people skills is to get job training dollars to do it... (Family Service Provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Participants stated that increased job training was not only implicit to their communities' empowerment strategies, but that training also needed to be oriented toward occupations that could help move families out of poverty and into available positions in the job market.

> Job training needs to be realistic job training, quality job training... putting people out there to count paper clips is not going to get them the money to support their family. It's a waste. You are building pipe dreams when you are training folks and they get out on the street and there is nothing there. (Agency Executive Director, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Community members described instances where families had become discouraged after unsuccessful attempts to transition from welfare to the work place. Further, children who observe their parents' failed attempts to transition from welfare to work learn about frustration and hopelessness. Without adequate preparation and transitional support systems such as child care and transportation, families have a much more difficult time successfully transitioning from welfare to work.

Investing in the Community

Community groups and service providers encouraged the economic empowerment of the entire African American community as a strategy for fighting poverty. Empowerment initiatives can help build the economic base and provide jobs within the community.

> We are looking for the jobs and expecting jobs, but we aren't able to go out and create jobs and create our own media to deal with the positive things that are going on. We need to take ownership ... empower ourselves by remaining in the community and building small businesses. Money that is made in the community should stay in the community. (Executive Director, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

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A program director in Houston saw positive changes in her community as it struggled with its economic development.

> People are being forced to collaborate more with each other and find resources. That's a good turn of events. As a result, there's more reliance on community and self to do things. There has been the birth of community development corporations throughout the city. There's a "we're coming back" mentality with signs of middle class blacks coming back into the community. We have a couple of banks that have relocated here. They're doing great business. Insurance companies are beginning to invest in the area. People are looking at the community differently. (Program Director for an enrichment program, Houston, September 29, 1995)

Empowering African American communities to strengthen their own economic base is a positive step toward improving the lives of thousands of children in Texas.

Self-Help for African American People Through Education, Inc. (SHAPE) Community Center

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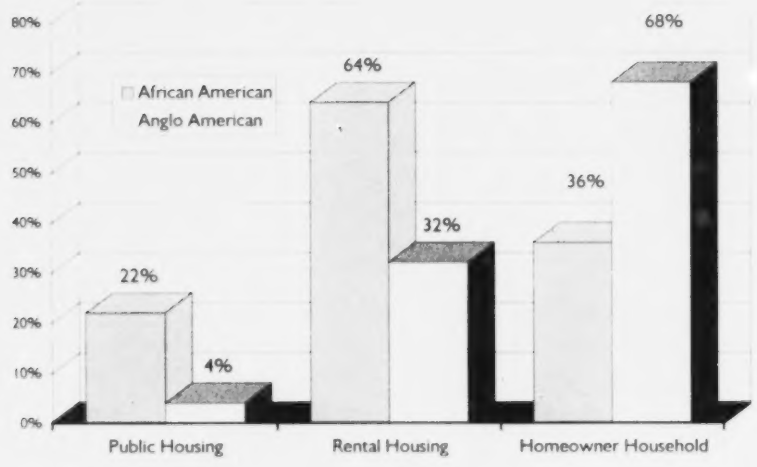
SHAPE Community Center's mission is to improve the quality of life for people of African descent through programs and activities with an emphasis on unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Since its inception in 1969, SHAPE has been involved in the creation, implementation and operation of education, cultural enrichment, employment, economic development, and crime/juvenile delinquency prevention programs for inner city residents. SHAPE's goal is to provide programs and activities aimed at empowering children and youth, parents and other adults, and community organizations, groups and institutions to regain control of their lives, homes and communities, and to return those communities to their original greatness. This is accomplished through a variety of family strengthening and empowerment programs, which include after school and summer enrichment for youth and their extended families, cultural and recreational programs, youth entrepreneurial and economic development, community organizing, health and nutrition education (including HIV/AIDS and alcohol/drug prevention), parent skills training, and video production classes.

SHAPE also offers community services, partnership activities, and annual community events. Community collaborations are used to address community issues, concerns, and needs through the development and maintenance of partnerships with community stakeholders, such as schools, churches, governmental agencies, businesses, and community-based organizations. Annual celebrations include seasonal programs such as Kwanzaa celebrations, pan-African cultural festivals, and other unity-based activities.

Housing

Living in areas of high poverty reduces access to jobs, limits access to supportive social networks and role models, and decreases contact with stable, job-holding families.[29] These areas of concentrated poverty often consist of families living in public housing or rental properties. African American families are far more likely to live in public housing or in rental housing than Anglo families. In 1994, 22 percent of African American families lived in public housing nationwide compared to 4 percent of Anglo American families.[30] In 1990, 54 percent of African American Texans rented their homes, while 46 percent of Hispanic Texans and 33 percent of Anglo Texans rented.

U.S. Families by Housing Type, 1994



African American families are more likely to live in rental housing.

> There are pockets within the city of Nacogdoches and the outlying area that have 'projects.' The lower income people tend to gravitate there because they can afford it. It is sad because the slumlords put high prices on these cruddy apartments, and it forces many of the African American and Hispanic families to live multi-family in one room. (Agency Director, Nacogdoches, March 21, 1996)

According to the 1996 State Low Income Housing Plan (TDHCA), 63 percent of Texas' African American households are considered low-income (compared to 33% of Anglo American households).[31] Unfortunately, there is not enough public (nor affordable) housing to sufficiently meet the needs of low-income families. Furthermore, TDHCA's 1995 Community Needs Survey found that 83 percent of community housing professionals and agencies in Texas recognized shortages of rental housing in their communities.[32]

The Effects of Racism on Housing Opportunities

Recent research shows that racial and ethnic bias continue to influence the ability of African Americans to acquire housing. A needs assessment conducted for the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) revealed that in Texas, "a disproportionate percentage of minority mortgage applications are denied or withdrawn."[33] This practice is commonly know as *redlining* and occurs when a bank, insurance company, or other financial institution refuses to provide services to a consumer because of the location of the consumer's property. While redlining "may begin from a discriminatory practice or from a temporary neighborhood decline,"[34] the practice can become self-perpetuating. When insufficient mortgage and business loans are available to a community, fewer loans are available in the future. In turn, the lack of evidence of successful lending to a

community (possibly due to earlier discriminatory practices), combined with difficult lending procedures (such as expensive down payment requirements), makes it difficult to remedy the unfair lending practices of the past.

One expert suggested that strategies to combat loan disincentives lie in community bank coalitions. These coalitions will often accept a greater range of information on which to base a loan, provide greater access to lenders, and perform outreach to potential customers through community organizations.[35]

Overcrowding and Affordability

The TDHCA's 1996 State of Texas Consolidated Plan reported that over one-third of African American owner households in Texas experienced one or more problems with their residence while only 18.8 percent of Anglo owner households encountered such problems. Among the problems listed by the Consolidated Plan were cost burdens and overcrowding.

Even poor quality housing can be difficult for low-income families to afford. For example, the 1994 CHAS report indicated: "[S]ingle mothers typically spend as much as 50 to 80 percent of their income on housing. Such a severe cost burden, combined with the need for child care, leaves single women very much at risk of becoming homeless."[36] Focus group participants repeatedly discussed challenges in obtaining adequate housing for single African American mothers, particularly single teenage mothers.

> We need housing and transitional housing for minors with children. If basic needs aren't met, such as a safe, secure place to be, the family is destined to stay in the welfare system. (Agency Director, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

According to interviews, as families leave the welfare system, and enter more standard housing, life skills training is needed to help them successfully

transition to self-support. Practitioners explained that families who leave "projects" and move into more standard housing require training in how to care for their new environment. Transitional services for families moving from public housing to more traditional residences fall under the TDHCA's mission: "To promote and protect fair and equal housing choices for all Texans with particular emphasis on minority groups, low-income persons, and persons with special needs."[37]

> There is a need for home management living skills training. When you take people out of poverty and take them from substandard housing to standard housing, that doesn't mean they are going to know how to take care of a house. (Social Service Provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

The need for transitional programs and resources is becoming a central issue in strategies to address the needs of poor Texans. These issues are becoming even more apparent as traditional entitlement programs undergo major changes.

Income Support Programs

The economic security of families with children has declined severely over the last two decades. This decline can be attributed to a combination of factors, including a "lack of growth in high wage, high benefit jobs, the isolation of inner city residents from suburban jobs, and the inadequacy of worker skills for technically demanding positions".[38] As the economic security of families decreases, the risks for children increase.[39]

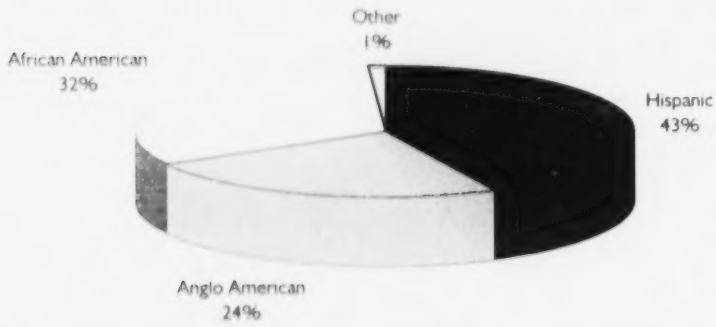
Social services provide a vitally important safety net for disadvantaged children and their families. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities recently reported that both the number and percentage of individuals removed from

poverty by safety net programs reached an all-time high in 1995.[40] Between 1983 and 1995, the number of children nationally who were removed from poverty by government benefit programs doubled. Most of the children lifted above the poverty line by safety net programs are children in working families.[41]

Aid to Families with Dependent Children[42] (AFDC; now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF) has been the primary financial assistance to families with children living in poverty. There are two programs for families: AFDC-Basic and AFDC-Unemployed Parent (UP). AFDC-Basic is provided when one or both parents are absent from the home, deceased, or disabled. AFDC-UP provides assistance for families where one parent is temporarily unemployed. In 1995, 3.9 percent of monthly recipients were in the unemployed parent program.[43] Most AFDC (now TANF) recipients are single mothers.

The value of AFDC benefits has fallen steadily over the last two decades, creating even greater hardship for our poorest families.[44] Nationally, the purchasing power of benefits under the AFDC program for a family of four with no other income fell by 47 percent between 1970 and 1993.[45] Texas' AFDC and Food Stamp benefits fell in value 67 percent between 1970 and 1993, placing Texas worst in the nation in percent change in benefit value.[46] African American families, who make up roughly one third of Texas TANF recipients, are particularly affected by this loss in the purchasing power of benefits.[47]

AFDC Recipients by Ethnicity, 1995



One-third of AFDC recipients are African American. New changes in welfare regulations could result in greater hardship for these families. Services to help people transition from welfare to work are essential.

Welfare reform could result in more families moving into and remaining in poverty[48]: "[C]utting federal safety net expenditures... over the next six years and allowing states to withdraw an additional $40 billion in state funds from the safety net programs, as the new welfare law does, is likely to weaken the safety net and increase poverty rates."[49]

New eligibility guidelines and time limits on TANF benefits will mean that more recipients must find ways to enter the work force. Services to help people while they transition from welfare to work are essential. Parents who are no longer eligible for income support must obtain employment with adequate wages, medical benefits, reliable transportation, and appropriate child care. If this is not possible, many recipients and their children will only become more impoverished. "Under TANF, a steadily rising fraction of single mothers will lose this safety net and will have to plan on periods without income."[50]

Community members thought that if poor mothers had access to adequate employment and affordable housing, the need for welfare would be significantly reduced.

> ...very little attention has been given to developing a program for successful transition from social service support to employment.... The welfare system as it has been developed has become a "paper husband" for single mothers. It has done a great deal to take away from the initiative of a lot of black parents. (Retired Social Worker, Houston, September 27, 1995)

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JUVENILE CRIME

While Texas has unacceptably high juvenile arrest rates, the vast majority of all arrests (93.5%) are for non-violent crimes such as theft, vandalism, running away, and disorderly conduct. Although juvenile arrests for violent crimes (murder, manslaughter, robbery, rape, aggravated assault) in Texas doubled between 1985 and 1991 (from 173 to 346 arrests per 100,000 teens 10-17 yrs.), the rate of increase has slowed somewhat since 1991. In 1994, 427 youths per 100,000 were arrested for violent crimes.

Minorities comprise a disproportionate share of juvenile justice clients at every stage of the process.[51] African American youth are more likely to be arrested and detained than members of other ethnic groups for the same charges.[52] In Texas, the arrest rate for violent crimes was almost three times as high for African American youth as for all Texas youth (1261 vs. 426 per 100,000 youth 10-17 yrs. old).

Rate of Arrests of Children (per 100,000 10-17 yr.-olds) in Texas, 1994

	African American	Total (all 10-17 yr. olds)
Murder	54.7	19.8
Manslaughter	0.0	1.0
Forcible Rape	38.6	18.2
Robbery	606.4	152.1
Aggravated Assault	561.3	234.4
TOTAL	**1260.9**	**425.7**

*The ethnic group of children under 10 yrs. arrested for violent crimes is not known. In calculating these rates, we subtracted all arrests under 10 from the African American group. This gives us a conservative arrest rate for African American youth 10-17 years old. In 1994, children under 10 were arrested for 2 murders, 6 forcible rapes, 9 robberies, and 35 aggravated assaults

African American youth are placed in juvenile justice facilities at three times the rate of Anglo American youth[53] and are more likely to be confined in public rather than private facilities as well as in more secure facilities.[54] Once young African Americans enter the juvenile justice system, they are subject to more frequent arrests, prosecution, and punishment for criminal behavior.[55]

Focus group participants referred to the prevalence of both crime and victimization as a consequence of poverty. They suggested that a sense of hopelessness is a primary factor in the choices youth make regarding criminal activity. A member of one agency explained:

> Many African Americans have a state of mind of hopelessness. I see a lot of youth who don't see a future, don't have a sense of hope, or of well-being for themselves. They see a short vision in terms of day-to-day existence. That leads to all kinds of misbehaviors and self-destructiveness... (Program Director, Houston, September 28, 1995)

> We need to utilize strategies that help youth feel they have a sense of control over their lives. We need to make choices that can lead them into good pathways rather than negative pathways and teach them how to solve problems for themselves. The signs are there... joblessness, crime, drug use... those are symptomatic reflections of the crisis. We need to help them get on track. (Program Director, Houston, September 28, 1995)

The multi-factored causes of poverty and disenfranchisement can not only produce hopelessness in children facing these circumstances, but can also stimulate frustration with their environment. The key, according to another

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focus group participant, is for children to learn to turn anger-based energy into a positive resource for change:

> Right now, our youth and kids are looking real strong with some destructive energy... If we could just shift that so that it's constructive, it's just as strong. I think it is the only resource our families and communities have, so we better shape it... we have no choice. (Health Center Manager, Houston, September 27, 1995.)

Policy choices that involve incarcerating more juveniles is not the best choice.[56] With proper intervention, offending youth can be managed in community-based programs. Once juveniles have entered the system, however, creative strategies must be developed to help youthful offenders avoid recidivism. These children need a continuum of care that will reward them for appropriate behavior and help them transition into productive adulthood. Any solution should include provisions for education and job training. Family and individual counseling may also be necessary.

Communities will need to develop creative approaches to help youth stay out of the juvenile justice system. No one solution or program can be sufficient when dealing with the multi-faceted problem of juvenile arrests. In addition to programs designed to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system in the first place, serious efforts must be made to identify and correct situations where African American youth are unjustly accused of crimes they did not commit.

The Fifth Ward Enrichment Program

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The Fifth Ward Enrichment Program (FWEP) is a nationally-recognized violence prevention and mentoring program for high-risk minority youth in Houston's Fifth Ward and adjacent inner city areas. The program is based on the premise that societal and community conditions under which children live have a profound effect on the kinds of adults that they become. FWEP intervenes in children's lives on four levels: through one-on-one and group interaction with the youth; through work and contact with the youths' parents and family; through interaction with faculty and counselors of the youths' schools; and through projects and partnerships with community members and organizations.

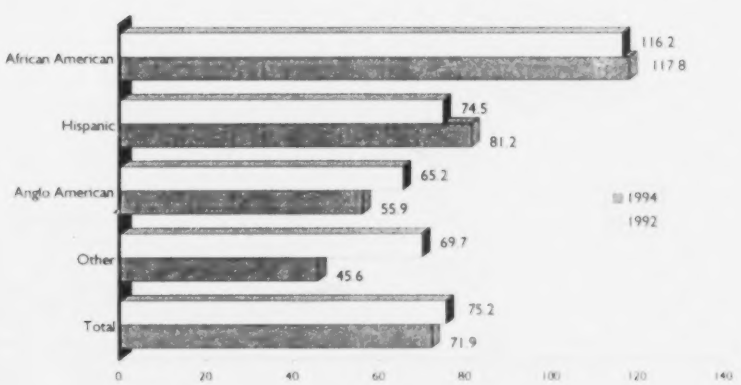
Participants in the program receive academic and therapeutic services such as tutoring and counseling, and participate in enrichment activities. During the school year, young African American men spend an average of two and a half hours each weekday afternoon with the program's mentors, as well as some weekends. A unique aspect of the program is that all staff who have contact with children in the program are African American males. A summer program provides full-day services and activities for participants during an 8-week program.

FWEP creates newsletters and sponsors workshops for the parents and family members of youth in the program. There are also support groups available to parents and family members, as well as parent-child activities and special events. FWEP staff visit the youths' homes and work with schools to ensure strong connections between the program and the youths' parents, other family members, and the educational institution.

Children as Victims of Violence

Too many African American children are the victims of violence in the form of homicide, suicide, accidents, and abuse. Nationally, since 1969, firearm homicide has consistently been the leading cause of death for African American males between the ages of 15 and 19 years.[57] Recent periods have seen an alarming increase in these figures. Between 1987 and 1989, the rate of firearm homicide for this group increased 71 percent. More recently it was found that "African American males, ages 15-19, are nearly 10 times as likely to be murdered as white males [in the same age group]."[58]

Teen Violent Death Rate, 1992 & 1994
(Number per 100,000 Teens Ages 15-19)



While the teen violent death rate went down between 1992 and 1994 for Anglo Americans, it went up for African American and Hispanic teens.

African American children in Texas are the victims of violence at unacceptably high rates. In Texas, homicide was the leading cause of death for African American teens in 1994.[59] The rate of African American teens who died violently (by accident, homicide or suicide) was significantly higher (117.8 deaths per 100,000 in 1994) than for Hispanic and Anglo teens (81.2 deaths and 55.9 deaths per 100,000, respectively).[60] While the teen violent death rate went

down between 1992 and 1994 for Anglos, it went up for African American and Hispanic teens.

Teen Violent Deaths (15-19 yrs.) in Texas, 1994			
	Anglo American	**African American**	**Hispanic**
Accident	255	55	194
Homicide	48	139	130
Suicide	101	20	45
TOTAL	**404**	**214**	**369**

Many African American children become the victims of violence in the form of child abuse. Reports of abuse and neglect have increased more that twice as fast as the child population itself between 1990 and 1994.[61] Children who are abused or neglected are more likely to be arrested for delinquent behavior, exhibit adult criminality, and perpetrate crimes of violence.[62] In Texas, there were 13,448 confirmed cases of child abuse among African American children in 1994. The rate of confirmed abuse is twice as high among African American children as Anglo children (19.3 vs. 8.9 per 1,000 children, respectively).

Children who live in abusive families are subject to higher levels of violence in their lives.[63] The damage, both physically and emotionally, to victims can be staggering. Costs to the community for law enforcement, health care, and social services can be enormous. Strong support systems must be developed to protect victims of abuse and treatment for abusers should be mandatory.

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Utoto Eastside Outreach Center

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Contact: Denise Bedard Ruiz

Utoto, the Swahili word for youth, is the name of an outreach program of the Juvenile Outreach and Vocational/Educational Network (JOVEN). JOVEN is a non-profit corporation dedicated to outreach, counseling, and structured activities for youth at risk of chronic delinquency, school failure, gang involvement and substance abuse. JOVEN recognizes that effective prevention, intervention, and diversion strategies must be culturally and linguistically sensitive to the target populations. Furthermore, the intervention strategies are designed to address the root problems within the context of the family and community.

The Utoto Outreach Center is located in a primarily African American neighborhood that has historically experienced economic decline, high crime rates, gang activity, and a lack of services for at-risk youth and their families. The center provides comprehensive services that include support groups, community service projects, transportation and field trips, home visits, school-based services, and recreational and sports activities. These services are centralized in one location and integrate the values and culture of the African American community. The primary target population is at-risk youth between the ages of 10 and 16. The project also involves family members, including parents and younger siblings.

EDUCATION

A good education is a vital defense against poverty. Significant changes in the type of skills demanded of today's workforce demand greater literacy and problem-solving skills as well as more technical skills. Too many of our children are not being adequately educated to become productive members of society. In particular, low levels of school attainment, coupled with high rates of educational attrition, raise questions about the school system's effectiveness in educating African American children. Some of the challenges facing African American students include the inequitable distribution of funds to school districts, biased standardized testing, lack of cultural sensitivity in curricula, a shortage of ethnic minority teachers, and a negative view of schools by parents. In addition to economic and cultural factors, there are also environmental issues, such as violence in the schools and other safety issues, that affect children's school attendance and performance.

School Funding

According to the *Kids Count Data Book 1997*,[64] the very communities that need good schools the most are the ones that are least likely to have them. "Schools with high proportions of poor kids score lower on standardized achievement tests, and students attending schools in poor neighborhoods learn less."[65] Schools in more affluent districts spend about 24 percent more per student than poor districts. Less affluent schools have fewer textbooks, less advanced technology, and less experienced teachers.[66]

A study of 900 Texas school districts found that school spending positively correlated with the quality of the education that students received.[67] Students in districts that spent more money per student received higher test scores in reading. Smaller classes and teachers with more experience, more advanced degrees, and higher salaries contributed to these effects. Ferguson (1991) suggests that states should increase the salaries of teachers and staff at the poorer schools in order to distribute good quality teachers throughout the districts.[68]

Texas' "ten highest-spending districts spend more than two-and-a-half times as much per pupil as its ten lowest spending districts."[69] Disparities in spending stem from disparities in property wealth because school funding comes from property taxes. In Needham (1993) reported, for example, that the Alamo Heights area (a property-rich district near San Antonio) has "13 times as much taxable value per pupil as Edgewood" (a property-poor district, also near San Antonio). The average teacher salary in Edgewood is $7,164 per year less than in Alamo Heights. Schools in property-rich districts had more experienced teachers, higher salaries, and a lower turnover rate than poor schools.

Many African American students go to schools in poor communities. These children deserve the same learning opportunities as more affluent children. Equitable funding strategies must be developed to improve the chances of providing disadvantaged African American children with a high quality education.

Educational Attrition

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the dropout rate for African American students nationally decreased between 1976 and 1992.[70] During this time period, the portion of African American students completing high school increased by 10 percent. In Texas, the estimated dropout rate for a group of African American students going from the 7th to the 12th grade has dropped from 41 percent in 1987-88 to 17.8 percent in 1993-94 (compared with a decline in the dropout rate for total population in Texas of 41% to 14.4%).[71] Although dropout prevention programs can certainly claim a large portion of the credit for the decline in the dropout rate, another explanation for the decline is that the Texas Education Agency has improved their ability to track students as they migrate from one school district to another.

Access to Education

Many children in rural communities have difficulty getting to school because of lack of transportation. Some school districts do not have bus services. According to a focus group participant in one rural East Texas community, children were denied access to school bus service because the road was privately owned by a major corporation. Due to liability issues, the company resisted public access to the road. With community outreach and pressure from parents, school buses finally acquired access to the road.[72]

Families and Schools Together

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Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a prevention and early intervention program for elementary school children at risk of dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, alcohol and other drug abuse, and/or developmental delays or learning disabilities. The FAST Program, first piloted in San Antonio during the 1993-1994 school year, is modeled after a Wisconsin program developed in 1988 by Lynn McDonald. McDonald worked with Family Service America (FSA) out of Milwaukee to provide a curriculum for area families. FSA's sister organization in San Antonio, Family Service Association of San Antonio, Inc., works with three school districts in the San Antonio area: South San Antonio Independent School District (ISD), San Antonio ISD, and Northside ISD. The program offers between 24 to 27 FAST sessions each school year.

The FAST program uses a family-based approach focused on relationships between children and their parents. A four-member team, consisting of a mental health specialist, a school representative, a substance abuse specialist, and a parent liaison from the community, work with participating families during 8 weeks of evening classes. Usually between eight and twelve families participate in each 8-week session. Over the last two years (1996 and 1997), an average of 550 families--1,500 children and 800 parents--have completed the program each year.

After families complete the 8-week training program, they may participate in a two-year follow-up program called FASTWORKS, comprised of monthly meetings with the parent liaison. Overall, the FAST program has seen 81% of its participating families complete the 8-week program between September, 1994 through March, 1997.

Alliance Schools Initiative

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The Alliance Schools Initiative is a collaborative, community-based effort committed to improving student achievement in low-income communities in Texas. It is a partnership between the Interfaith Education Fund (IEF), the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) Network, campus staff and parents, school district officials, Regional Education Service Centers, and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The initiative serves to build relationships and commitments among these stakeholders. Each of these constituencies' participation, in addition to that of other local community and business leaders, are an essential and integral part of creating Alliance Schools. Key principles of the Alliance Schools Initiative are deregulated campuses, the restructuring of relationships among school stakeholders, flexibility, local solutions to local needs, and self-directed reform. After local commitment to become an Alliance School is negotiated among stakeholders and established, Alliance Schools use allotted state funding in four basic areas: staff development, parent and community development, curriculum reform, and enrichment programs.

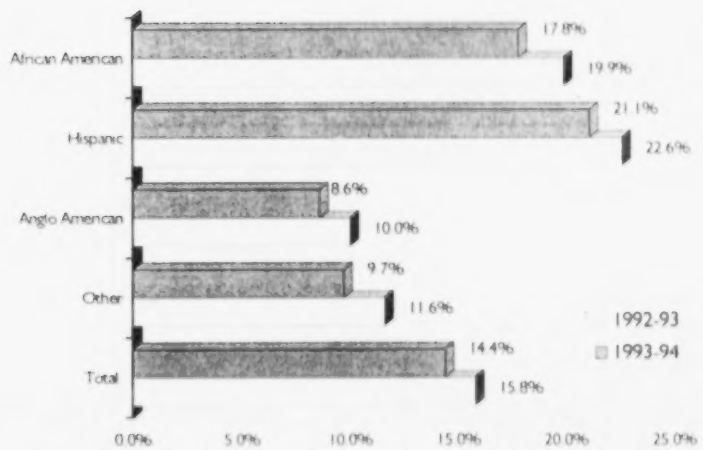
The Alliance Schools Initiative began in the 1992-1993 school year with 32 campuses, and has now grown to include 89 schools in Texas. In addition, over 100 other schools are working with the initiative to potentially implement the Alliance Schools philosophy. Since its inception the Alliance Schools Initiative has demonstrated success through several indicators, including increased parental involvement, improved student academic achievement, increased interest and involvement of new schools, and national acknowledgment as a model of successful school improvement.

Characteristics of Dropouts

Children who do not experience academic or behavioral success in school are more likely to become truant and/or drop out of school than those students who experience academic success. In the 1992-93 academic year, 32,994 African American students (7 percent of Texas' African American student population) were retained in their current grade level, while the overall retention rate for the state was five percent. Students who are retained and who are over age for their grade level are more likely to drop out than their counterparts who are promoted.[73]

Nearly half of those students who drop out were identified while they were in school as 'at risk' because they had been either retained in a grade, had failed at least two courses and were not expected to graduate on time, had failed at least one section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, or were pregnant or a parent.[74] The characteristics of dropouts must be considered as schools and community agencies develop dropout prevention programs.

Estimated Longitudinal Dropout Rates,
1992-1993 & 1993-1994



The dropout rate for African Americans has decreased

Teen Idleness

The term *teen idleness* (as defined by the U.S. Census) refers to adolescents who are no longer in school and who are not working. Teen idleness is related to low educational attainment, poor transitioning from school to the labor force, and a lack of positive role models for teens making the transition. In Texas, 7.8 percent of all 16 to 19 year-olds were idle teens in 1990; 17 percent of these teens were African American.[75]

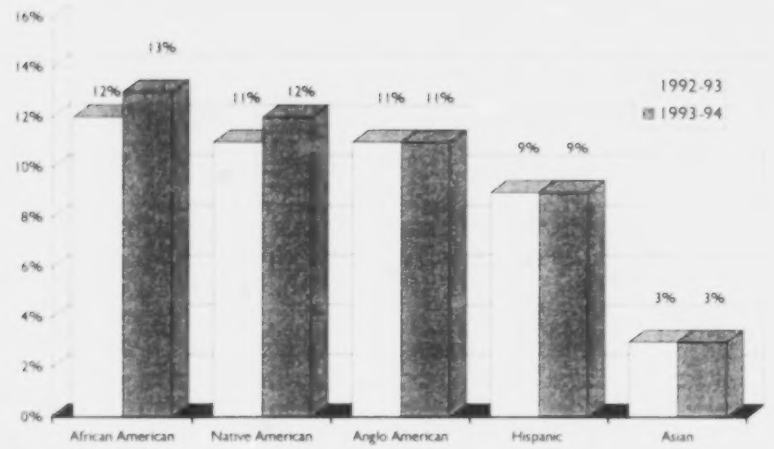
Interviewees and focus group participants acknowledged the need for interventions to keep kids in school. However, when a child leaves school, alternative education programs are needed to target students who have dropped out. Participants saw a need for community service agencies to provide technical and comprehensive training programs to the youth in their immediate area.

> All children, regardless of IQ, need to take a vocational course that will prepare them for at least one side job. (Retired Social Worker, Houston, October 19, 1995)

Concentration in Special Education

Students in special education[76] classes have been determined to suffer from a "handicapping condition" and are entitled to special education services. Focus group participants believed that many African American children were inappropriately placed in special education, based in part, on the results of culturally-biased standardized tests. Parents and service providers expressed concern that African American children are overrepresented in special education classes. Interestingly, the data show that only a slightly greater percentage of African American children are in special education classes than other ethnic groups. In the 1993-94 school year, of all African American students, 13 percent received special education while 9 percent of Hispanic children and 11 percent of Anglo American children received these services.[77]

Percent of Students in Special Education,
1992-93 & 1993-94



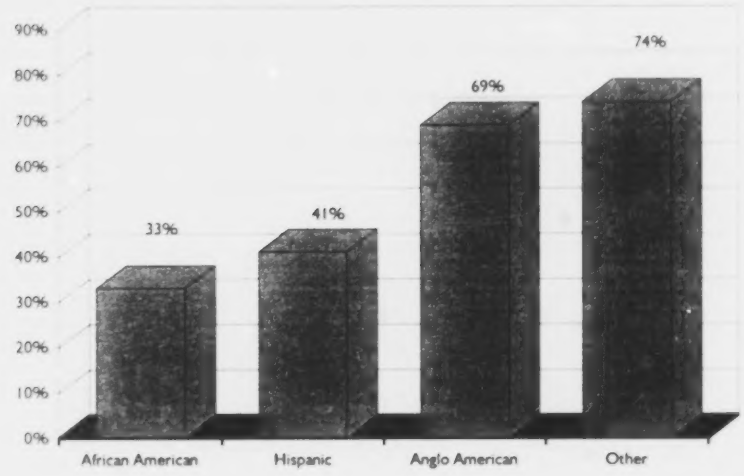
There is only a slightly higher percentage of African American students in special education compared to other groups.

Role of Testing

Since the 1990-91 school year, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test has been the assessment tool used by schools to determine whether a child has acquired minimum competency prior to graduation. African American students consistently record the lowest performances on the TAAS test.[78] According to the Texas Education Agency, however, "Texas minority students continue to make gains in closing the performance gap on TAAS, with double-digit gains in mathematics at grades 4 and 8."[79]

Over one-third of all economically-disadvantaged students passed the TAAS in the 1993-94 school year (39%).[80] Thus, economic disadvantage may be a primary influencing factor in poor TAAS test results.

Percent of Students Passing TAAS Test, Spring 1994



Thirty-three percent of African American students passed the TAAS test in 1994.

Service providers recommended revising both the curricula and standardized tests so that cultural bias is considered before making academic placement decisions. They described a community perception that culturally-biased tests are used in the school in order to classify or categorize children. Focus group participants believed that the TAAS tests are not written from a culturally sensitive perspective and do not measure the real potential of African American (or other ethnic minority) children.

> Another problem is the use of standardized tests that are not standard. The text in these tests does not relate to the diversity that is prevalent in the classroom.
> (Service provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Project GRAD

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Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) is a unique, comprehensive set of programs implemented in seven elementary schools that ultimately feed into Houston's Jefferson Davis High School, an older, inner-city school with a mostly minority student population. In the interest of reaching "at-risk" students at earlier ages, Project GRAD was begun in 1993. The long-term objectives of the Project GRAD initiative are to capture the hearts and minds of students at the beginning of their career before too many have been turned off or fall behind. Specifically, the objectives are to increase test scores of students above national norms and reduce the dropout rate. The project has phased into four programs addressing: community and parental involvement; interactive instruction and classroom management; new concepts of math instruction; and an effective instructional model to teach verbal, written, and reading skills.

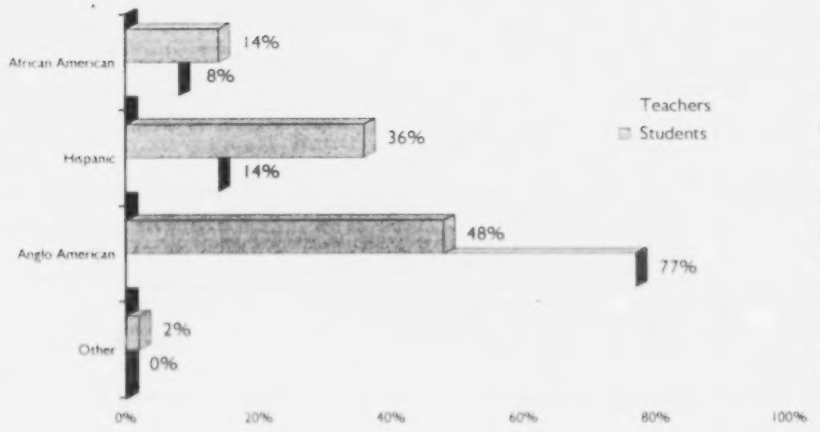
Project GRAD has been fully integrated into the Jefferson Davis elementary feeder system. Early results show encouraging improvement in TAAS math scores and in other areas. Pilot programs are being tested at the middle school level to enhance the effects of Project GRAD. The feeder system collaboration has inspired additional community support, including the establishment of a health clinic at one elementary school, transportation for other elementary schools to the clinic, and a nursery/day care facility at Davis High for middle and high school students with children. In addition, another Houston inner-city high school, Jack Yates High School, is beginning to implement Project GRAD.

Shortage of Ethnic Minority Teachers

African American and other ethnic minority teachers are under-represented in the schools in Texas. According to the Texas Education Agency, "the ethnic composition of district staff changed only slightly from the previous school year... Although slight increases [in minority representation] were observed in minority percents, Texas must continue to intensify ethnic minority recruitment into education careers."[81]

The shortage of ethnic minority teachers in Texas schools is especially notable when comparing the proportion of minority students to minority staff. In 1993-94, a 48 percent Anglo student population was served by a teaching staff that was 77 percent Anglo American. While African Americans represented 14 percent of the student population, only 8 percent of the teacher population was African American.[82]

Proportion of Teachers to Students in Public Schools, 1993-1994



The shortage of ethnic minority teachers in Texas schools is especially notable when comparing the proportion of minority students to minority staff.

While there can be benefits from positive contacts between teachers and students of different ethnic groups, focus group participants felt that it would be better if African American children had more opportunity to work with African

American teachers. Participants said that due to the lack of diversity in teaching staff, adolescents and children are forced to adjust to the styles and attitudes of culturally and ethnically different teachers. Without the opportunity to learn from individuals with similar backgrounds and experiences, children and adolescents are often unable to identify with teaching styles. Focus group participants also believed that an ethnic match between teachers, staff, and students is one way to provide positive role models to students.

Cultural sensitivity training was also proposed by members of the focus groups as a way to better equip teachers for work with a diverse student body. Focus group participants believed that this training should be a part of the teacher certification process.

> Teachers, today, are not equipped with the skills necessary to deal with cultural diversity in the classroom. (Program Coordinator, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

> Teachers need some training on cultural sensitivity. Most teachers do not have a clue to most of the cultural issues that impact their relationships with their students. (Caseworker, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

A sense of direction and opportunity for ongoing education is missing for many African American youth. Community members believed that many adolescents in urban areas place a low value on education and have limited expectations of acquiring some form of higher education. They attribute adolescents' negative perception of education, in part, to a lack of cultural sensitivity by teachers and administrators and limited role models.

Some focus group members believed that ethnic sensitivity was not an issue prior to the racial integration of schools.

> Our integration laws became almost a deficit for African American children in that a number of the experienced Black teachers who were concerned about our children were transferred out of the neighborhoods and schools and were replaced by inexperienced White teachers who didn't care, or were even afraid of Black children. The Black community needs good solid Black teachers who want to be there. (Retired Social Worker, October 19, 1995)

> There used to be a majority of teachers that were invested in their job, the students, and the community. Now you don't see that as often... I think one of the problems in the educational system has been integrated schools. I know that sounds strange, but many teachers do not know how to deal with diversity in the classroom. If you look at schools with predominately Black teachers, they don't have as many problems as far as the teacher adjusting to the needs of the children and community. (Family Service Provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

One community member said that integrating schools was a strategy that had good intentions but that it contributes to problems stemming from modern diversity. Group members believed that the solution would not be found in re-segregation of schools but in the recruitment and employment of staff that represent the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the student population.

Curriculum

Focus group participants noted that staff diversity should be complemented by a culturally sensitive curriculum. According to community

professionals, an antiquated curriculum is the most significant problem in educational service delivery today.

> The information that the children are learning in school tends to be eurocentric and adopts an upper middle class approach. (Program Coordinator, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Some are concerned that an overall reliance on culturally insensitive, eurocentric curricula poses problems for African American children who are in need of curricula that relate to their own life experiences.

> One of the problems is that the curriculum is too middle class and anglicized and we are trying to put our children into something that they are not ready for. We need to go back and begin with what they know and what is familiar to them. (Social Service Provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Schools with high concentrations of ethnic minority students tend to place a greater emphasis on cultural experiences and the development of a positive cultural identity. This practice, focus group participants argue, is one of the keys to creating an alliance between the academic institution and the ethnic minority student.

Parent and Community Perspectives

A 1987 study conducted by the National Education Association (NEA) found that African American parents tend to participate very little in school activities due to scheduling difficulties, the lack of child care, and the distance

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between the home and the school.[83] The study found that few African American parents felt comfortable visiting their children's schools, and that it was difficult for parents to discuss the needs of their children because they received limited information.[84] Service providers suggested a need for innovative outreach programs that address the needs of the community.

> The educational system needs to be revamped and returned to the basics. Parents need to get more involved in the schools. Parenting and how to build an economic base needs to be taught in school. (Retired Social Worker, Houston, October 19, 1995)

In a focus group meeting, a parent educator reported that some parents feel the educational process is not welcoming. Schools do not promote the idea of the teaching staff, administrators, and parents as team members. In order to reduce this alienating process, service providers recommended promoting communication between parents and school staff so that parents may feel more comfortable with the academic setting in general.

> We have developed a family resource room that is a drop-in center for informal parenting exchanges for parents to plan different activities that they want to do together. A place where they come and build a rapport with the school and don't just come because their child is in trouble. (Agency Director, Houston, September 27, 1995)

Safety in School

Many children, but particularly those in low-income neighborhoods, face the daily challenge of drugs and violence in school. According to the National

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Education Goals Panel, a significantly higher percentage of African American students report being threatened with injury by weapons at school than members of other ethnic groups.[85] Focus group participants expressed concern about school-based violence, particularly in urban areas, stating that schools need to provide students with a safe environment.

Importance of Education

The importance of education is growing in Texas because of changes in the economy and the workplace. In the future, children will need to develop more technical and computer skills. "Research shows that school completion and academic success increase children's ability to escape poverty, form strong families, and raise successful kids of their own."[86]

Focus group participants consistently recognized the importance of education to African American children.

> I think education is the key. I think that if they go to school and learn and get a trade or go to college, we can better our environment. We can enrich our lives, even if we are poor. If you have a fairly good education, you can enrich your own life and enrich the lives of your children, thereby enriching the lives of the community. (Child Protective Services worker, Houston, September 27, 1995)

A good education is an important way to improve the odds for African American children in Texas. The whole community needs to make education, including preschool, a top priority. The importance of high standards in curriculum and instruction as well as the involvement of the family should be emphasized. These are just a few ways to ensure that African American children get the education they need to become successful adults.

HEALTH

Healthy children are much better prepared to go to school each day ready to learn. However, children from low-income families are more likely to struggle with health problems than those children who come from families with more sufficient financial resources. Furthermore, lack of health insurance and inadequate access to health care substantially increases the risks for children. These risks lead to a higher incidence of low birthweight babies, infant mortality, child and teen disease and death. In the African American community, high rates for many of these negative health indicators are common.

Low income is also a status linked to early childbearing and lack of prenatal care.[87] Children born to low-income women, and particularly to teen mothers, are more likely to be born with low birthweights. African Americans are over-represented in both the numbers living in poverty and the number of unmarried teen mothers. Babies who are born prematurely suffer severe developmental delays and other congenital anomalies. Children with these characteristics are more likely to score lower on standardized tests, exhibit behavior problems, and have parents who lack the emotional maturity to help them.[88] Prevention strategies, such as prenatal care, are believed to reduce the

rate of low birth weight babies. Surprisingly, although more African American mothers are receiving prenatal care, the rate of low birthweight babies is increasing. This troubling trend will require more research to explain.

Inaccessible services and a general lack of preventive care are among the issues affecting African American children in Texas, particularly in rural areas. Barriers that exist in all communities, but in particular for African American families, include lack of health insurance, lack of access to services, and a shortage of health care professionals. These barriers impact the health of African American children, from infancy through adolescence.

One example of where the lack of health care is particularly evident is in the immunization rates. Texas ranks 49th in the nation in the percent of 2 year olds receiving all their immunizations.[89] Only 71 percent of 2-year-olds in Texas were fully immunized, while the national average for immunizations within this age group was 75 percent.[90] In 1994, immunization rates were lower and disease rates were higher for African American and Hispanic Texans than for other ethnic groups.[91]

Lack of Health Insurance

In 1994, Texas had the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation. Twenty-two percent of Texas children were uninsured, compared to the national average of thirteen percent.[92] Employer-based health care coverage has eroded during the past 20 years as employers have chosen to "drop all coverage, end dependent coverage, or increase employees share of premiums for dependents."[93]

The Medicaid program provides health insurance primarily for people in poverty. The ethnic distribution of Medicaid recipients in Texas reveals that African American Texans are over-represented in the overall Medicaid population. Although African Americans made up only 12 percent of the Texas

population in 1994, they represented 22 percent of the recipients of Medicaid benefits.[94]

Access to Medicaid services is a problem for many African American families. Many primary care physicians are not taking new Medicaid patients, in part because Medicaid reimbursement is very low. Additionally, provider shortages severely impact rural areas of Texas, affecting the provision of primary and preventive care for many low-income Texans.[95]

Access to Services

Both rural and urban areas of Texas report having problems gaining access to health care services. In Texas, 56 rural counties do not have a hospital. Furthermore, within the last 10 years, 53 rural and 63 urban hospitals have closed.[96]

A scarcity of physicians contributes to the lack of access to medical services in rural counties. The State Medicaid Office has identified 188 Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA's)--a number higher than for any other state in the country. As might be expected, the rural areas of Texas account for the largest number of shortage areas. "Although about 20 percent of Texans live in rural counties, only about 9 percent of Texas doctors practice in rural counties."[97]

Health professional shortages are not only a concern for those in rural communities, but also affect urban areas. Twenty-two urban counties in Texas contain HPSA's. Inner city neighborhoods and areas inhabited by low-income and impoverished families are the most likely to be underserved. Many of these neighborhoods have high percentages of African American families. In urban portions of Texas, limited access to adequate health care providers often increases the use of indigent health services in settings such as "emergency rooms, hospital outpatient departments, and large clinics, all of which have much higher overhead costs than office-based physicians..."[98] Furthermore, the lack of

health professionals and lack of access to health services create a reduction in the number of African American women utilizing prevention services such as prenatal care.

Even children qualified for Medicaid do not necessarily receive services. One service provider noted this as a significant problem, particularly in the rural regions of Texas. Residents of rural African American communities discussed the lack of access to medical professionals and the lack of transportation in their area.

> I have a mom who we've seen through one of our special programs who has a lot of problems; some are mental health, some are physiological, some are emotional. The children need assistance too but there just isn't a great deal available here. If you refer and there's no means of transportation to get where she needs to go, it's not going to help. (Administrator of Health Services, Waller County, September, 1995)

The lack of transportation is not only an issue for families who reside in rural communities, but it is also a problem for families in urban areas.

> I have seen families that don't leave the community to seek services in another part of the city. They remain here in the neighborhood. This is primarily due to transportation problems. For many it takes up to three transfers on the bus just to get downtown. (Agency Director, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Focus group participants saw a need for programs to provide adequate and economically-efficient preventive care for those who do not have reliable transportation. Service providers also suggested that community-based services

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could address a lack of trust in public clinics within the African American community.

> Health care is such a political issue today... It bothers me that we don't spend funds to buy buses, or whatever is necessary to send African American nurses out into the community where African Americans are because some don't like, or trust public health clinics. (Health Care Administrator, Houston, September 27, 1995)

Service providers reported that the fragmented nature of the health care system also creates a significant barrier for many families. They identified a need for a more holistic approach to health care. For example, programs providing sick and well care should be combined to provide more consolidated and coordinated services.

> We need to try to consolidate centers and programs so that we have more of a holistic approach to deal with health care and not a programmatic approach. The people want comprehensive health care. They want to go to one clinic only and have things taken care of in a collaborative fashion. (Health Service Provider, Houston, September 27, 1995)

> When providing services, we need to think about where people are going. We should go to the churches, beauty salons, and athletics events and educate people there. (Health Care Worker, Houston, January 12, 1996)

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People in Partnership

Frederick Douglass Family Resource Center
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In 1994, the Frederick Douglass Family Resource Center was opened in Houston's Third Ward as part of the Casey Mental Health Initiative for Urban Children. The Center serves as a door by which the community can access health and social services, economic and academic services, and other resources for families and children. The center is part of a community-wide collaboration of several health and human service agencies including; Houston Independent School District, Communities in Schools, Inc., the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Department of Human Services, the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority, the Cerebral Palsy--Early Childhood Intervention Program, and the Americorps and VISTA Projects.

The Family Resource Center is just one part of a greater collaboration. In 1996, the Initiative began a community election for members of a Neighborhood Governing Board. Nineteen representatives from the community sit on the board of what is now known as People in Partnership, a non-profit established in 1996 to carry on the work of the Casey Mental Health Initiative. People in Partnership provides broker services to insure appropriate services are brought to Houston's Third Ward Community, and serves a broader role in advocating for public policy reforms to better address the community's needs.

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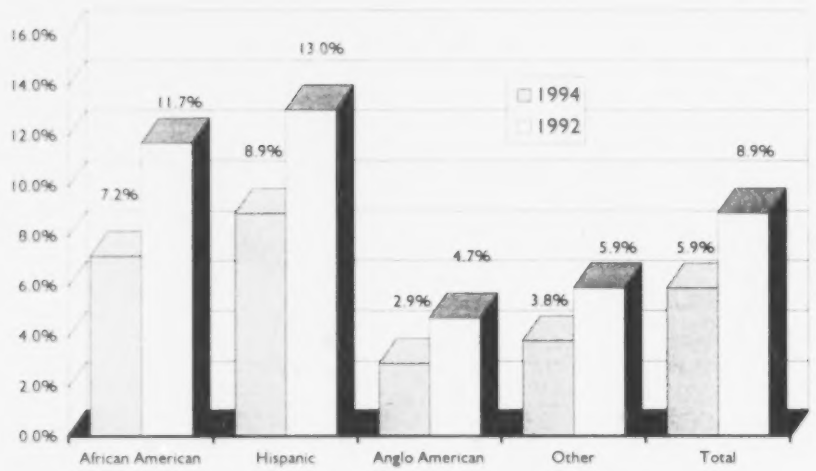
Prenatal Care

In Texas, minority women are the least likely to receive prenatal care (that is, care in the third trimester only or none at all). In 1994, more African American mothers received prenatal care. The rate of African American women receiving little or no prenatal care decreased from 11.7 percent in 1992 to 7.2 percent in 1994.[99] This percentage is still disproportionately high compared to that of the general population, which decreased from 8.9 percent to 5.9 percent in the same two-year period.[100]

Percent of Mothers Receiving Little or No Prenatal Care, 1992 and 1994



A larger portion of African American mothers are receiving prenatal care. However, too many African American mothers are still receiving inadequate prenatal care.

Focus groups of health care service providers emphasized the importance of preventive care to the physical well-being of children. Focus group participants also recognized the need to educate parents on preventive health care, and emphasized the need to teach prenatal care as an essential aspect of preventive health care.

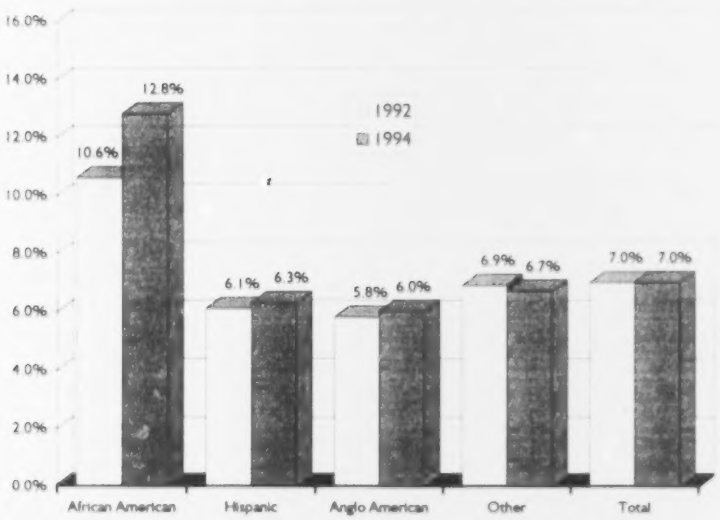
A focus group participant described how lack of access to prenatal care affected the community.

> The University has a high-risk prenatal program, so once a week there is an OB/GYN who comes in. That is the only time that there is an OB/GYN in the entire county. That's real significant because it means that prenatal care has not always been available here. (Health Care Administrator, Prairie View, September 14, 1995)

Low Infant Birth Weight

In spite of the fact that more African American mothers are getting prenatal care, the percent of low birth weight babies among African Americans is rising. In 1992, 10.6 percent of African American babies born in Texas had a low birth weight (2,500 grams or less).[101] Although the percent of low birth weight babies in the general Texas population remained constant between 1992 and 1994 at 7 percent, the percent of low birth weight African American babies increased by 2.2 percent over the two-year period.[102]

Percent of Low Birth Weight Babies, 1992 & 1994



In spite of the fact that more African American mothers are receiving prenatal care, the percent of low birthweight babies is rising.

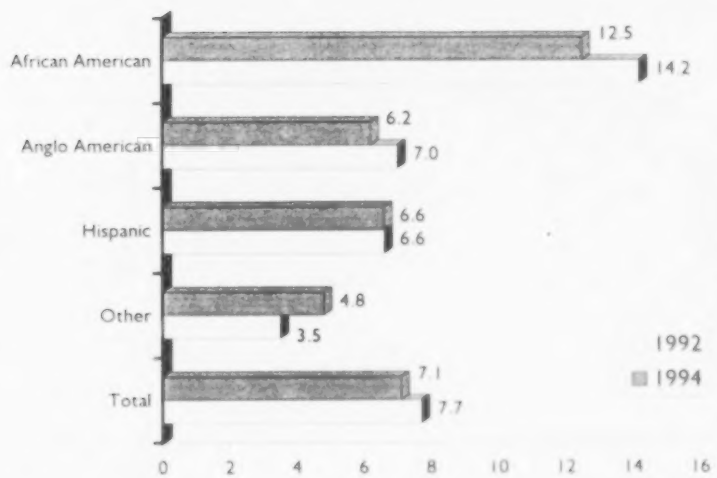
The high rate of babies born with low birth weights is cause for concern. Babies born with low birth weights are at a greater risk of infant death and are more likely to experience a number of childhood disabilities. In addition, deliveries of low birth weight babies incur high hospital bills due to the intensive neonatal care required.[103]

Infant Mortality

In 1994, 12 out of every 1,000 African American infants died in Texas. By contrast, 6.6 out of every 1,000 Hispanic infants, and 6.2 out of every 1,000 Anglo American infants died before their first birthday. Although the infant mortality rate is significantly higher for African Americans than for other ethnic groups in Texas, the rate improved more between 1992 and 1994 for African Americans than any other ethnic group (decreasing by 2 percent).

Infant Mortality Rates, 1992 & 1994

(Number per 1,000 Live Births)



Although the infant mortality rate for African Americans is decreasing, it is still much higher for African American infants than for other groups.

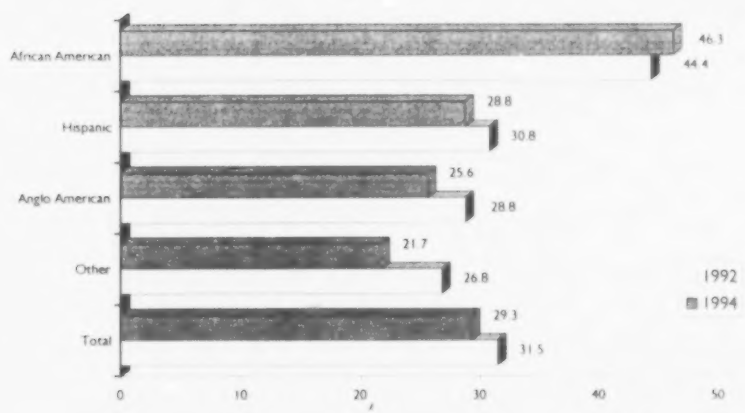
Focus group participants suggested that new strategies must be developed to insure early identification of infants at risk of dying.

> We are not putting the resources where they are needed. We need to go into communities and identify the babies that are dying... look for the risk factors and address them. We are not going to do it by asking people to come to the clinics or by putting educational programs on TV...We must get out into the community where people are. (Health Care Provider, Houston, September 27, 1995)

Child Death Rates

African American children in Texas show a significantly higher death rate than in other ethnic groups. While child death rates decreased for most ethnic groups between 1992 and 1994, child death rates for African American children increased by nearly 2 percent during that time period.[104] The leading causes of death in 1994 for children 1 to 14 years were accidents, malignant neoplasms, and homicide. These deaths raise troubling questions about how to protect the safety of our children.

Child Death Rate from All Causes for Children Ages 1-14, 1992 & 1994

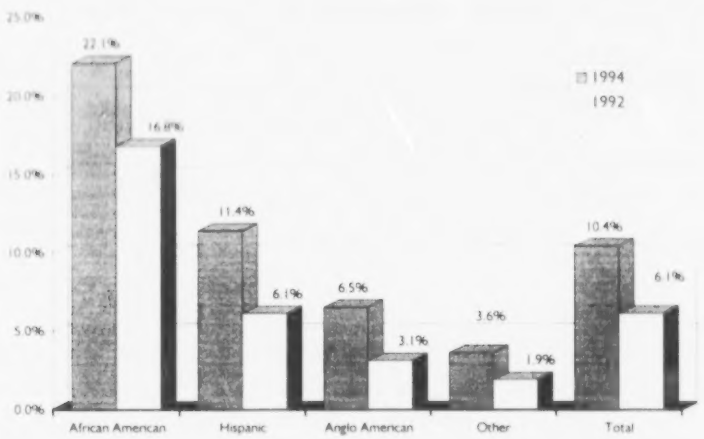


While child death rates decreased for most ethnic groups between 1992 and 1994, they increased for African American children.

Births to Single Teens

In 1995, the U.S. Census reported a decrease in both the national teenage birth rate and the rate of babies born out-of-wedlock within the African American community.[105] However, in Texas, the percent of births to single African American teens had increased between 1992 and 1994 (from 16.9 to 22.1%). The proportion of births to single teens in Texas was highest among African Americans: in 1994, 22.1 percent of all live births to single teens were to African Americans, 11 percent to Hispanics, 6.5 percent to Anglo Americans, and 3.6 percent to other groups.[106] Comparisons of the 1992 and 1994 births to single teens must be used with caution. The definition of 'single' used by the Texas Department of Health has changed significantly, thus making the interpretation of this data problematic. Between 1989 and 1993, if the father's name was given on the birth certificate, the parents were considered 'married', regardless of actual marital status. In 1994, a new question was added to the birth certificate application specifically asking for the marital status of the parents. The number of 'single' teens has gone up under this new definition.

Births to Single Teens, 1992 & 1994



More than one in five births to African Americans is to a 'single' teen.

Early childbearing is associated with a number of risks for both the mother and child.[107] The risk of an infant dying in the first year of life is greater for those babies born to teen mothers. Teen mothers are more likely than older mothers to abuse their children. Children of adolescent mothers score lower on standardized tests of language and intellectual functioning and are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, ranging from hyperactivity to poor impulse control.[108]

Focus group participants expressed concerns that current preventive efforts do not adequately address the problem of teen pregnancy. One interview participant stated that the emphasis on prevention of teen pregnancy, in some areas, has been limited to the more "progressive schools."

> In our county there are three school districts. Each has its own high school. While one of the districts is very progressive, the other districts are not, so there is a lot of denial in terms of teen sexual activity. Basically, the belief, as we understand it from the parents, is that it is not an issue. So, there is no reason to talk about it. (Health Services Administrator, Prairie View, September 14, 1995)

Some research participants suggested that a policy promoting teen pregnancy prevention curricula in all schools would support their community's prevention efforts.

Seton Home

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Seton Home was founded in San Antonio in 1981 by the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women. Seton Home provides shelter for pregnant adolescents, caring for about 65 teens and their children each year. The shelter provides up to sixteen adolescent mothers at a time with the services and opportunities to work toward a better future for themselves and their children. Adolescent mothers typically stay at Seton Home for an average of three months after the birth of their children, during which time, they participate in programs providing parenting skills education, personal enrichment and development activities, prenatal care, and residential and transitional home services. Seton Home also provides disbursement of donations made to the organization. In September, 1997 Seton Home will be opening its Transition Home which will provide transition services and extended service programs to eight Seton Home mothers and their children. There, young mothers and their children can receive further guidance and support through the children's first year and a half to two years of life.

Project H.O.P.E.

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Project H.O.P.E. (Helping One Person Excel) is one of many programs offered through Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, Inc. in the Fort Worth area. The non-profit agency modeled the program after a program developed by Dr. Michael Carrera in Harlem, New York which was able to reduce that area's teen pregnancy rate from 54% to 4% within a ten-year period. Project H.O.P.E. is a holistic program which provides not only academic and sexual education for teens at risk for pregnancy, but also develops mentoring relationships and provides structural guidance for teens.

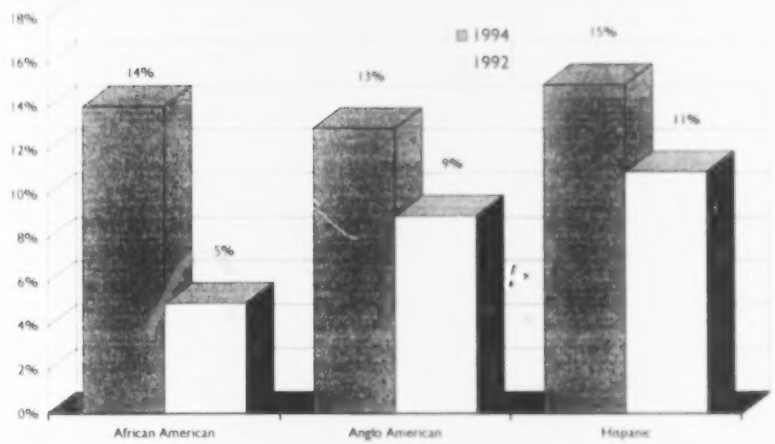
Begun in 1994, the Fort Worth program currently works with 24 children and teens, about half of them African American. Al Martinez, director of the program began working with the children when they were in the fourth and fifth grades, and plans to continue his work with them until they graduate from high school. Martinez and three other staff members provide educational and support activities covering eight main areas: family life/sex education, medical/health services, academic assessment/tutoring, job club/career counseling, mental health services, lifetime individual sports mastery, self-esteem enhancement, and guaranteed college admission and/or job training and placement. Children are provided these services for three to four hours a day after school and during the summer, and every other weekend.

Teen Alcohol and Drug Use

Substance use among all Texas adolescents has increased. African American students showed a 9 percent increase in the use of illicit substances between 1992 and 1994. By comparison, illicit substance use increased by only 4 percent for Anglo and Hispanic students.[109] Interview participants identified accessibility to illicit drugs as a major part of the problem.

> We have a big problem with adolescent drug abuse. There is such easy access to drugs. For those in single headed households, where the parent has to work, there is no one to supervise... (Health Care Provider, Houston, September 27, 1995)

Reported Past-Month Substance Use by Secondary Students, 1992 & 1994



Reported past-month substance use has risen sharply between 1992 and 1994, particularly for African American students.

Focus group members acknowledged the need for strong prevention programs that increase students' awareness of the negative consequences of drug

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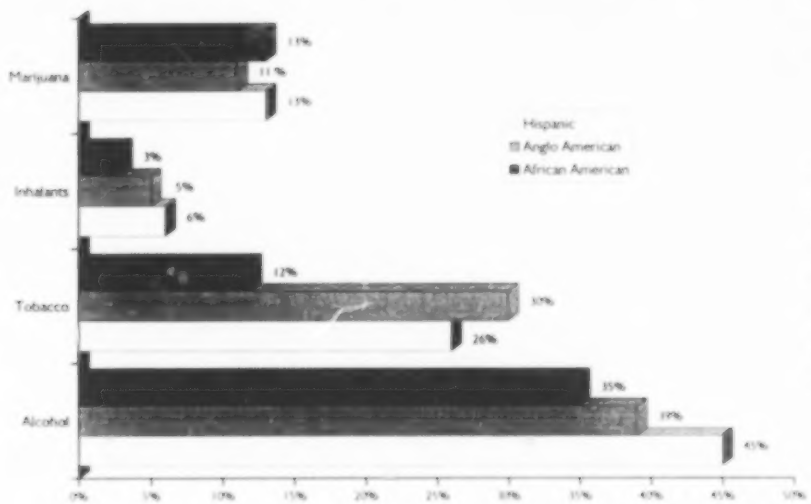
use. One health care provider noted the importance of using frequent Public Service Announcements geared toward children and adolescents.

Although overall substance use among African American students increased between 1992 and 1994, the reported use of tobacco, inhalants, and alcohol by African American students is less than for Anglo American and Hispanic students. Twelve percent of African American students in grades 7 through 12 reported that they had used tobacco in the past month compared with 26 percent of Hispanic students and 30 percent of Anglo students. Similarly, higher percentages of Hispanic and Anglo students reportedly used inhalants (6 percent and 5 percent) compared with African American students (3 percent).[110]

Reported Past-Monthly Substance Use of Secondary Students by Substance, 1994

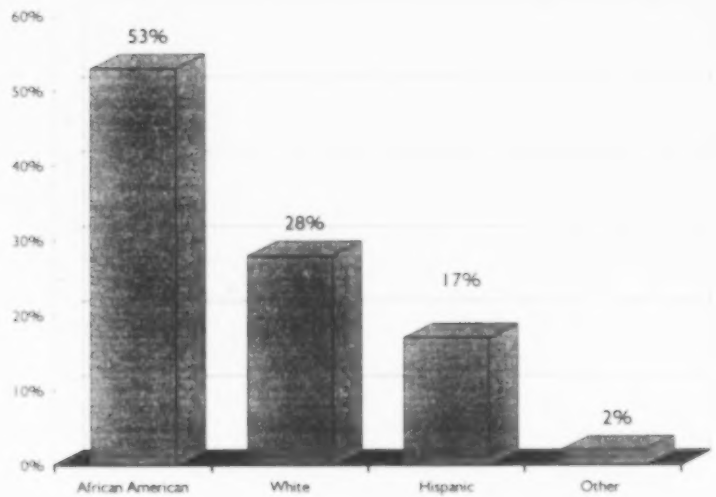


The reported use of tobacco, inhalants, and alcohol by African American students is less than for Anglo and Hispanic students.

HIV and Teens

Between 1994 and 1996, African Americans had the highest rate of HIV infection among Texas teens aged 13 to 19. Although African American youth make up approximately 13 percent of the Texas child population, African Americans made up 53 percent of reported cases of HIV infection for teens age 13 to 19. African American teenage girls alone represented 37 percent of the cases reported for youth in their age group.[111] "Adolescents are at high risk for acquiring HIV for several reasons, including a tendency to have multiple partners, to have unprotected sex, and to use alcohol and other drugs."[112]

Cases of HIV Infection Among Teens Ages 13-19, 1994-1996



African American adolescents are at risk for acquiring HIV infection.

Interview participants acknowledged the need for comprehensive HIV/AIDS education and prevention for young people. School-based curricula in risk reduction, peer education programs, and increased community involvement in HIV prevention programs all are needed to address the level of HIV/AIDS among teenagers.[113]

Understanding risks associated with sexually-transmitted diseases is important. A study performed by medical students in St. Louis, Missouri found that "education and knowledge are not a definitive solution to the problem. All teenagers must realize the risk... [and not] subscribe to the myth that 'it can't happen to me.' They need to see that this [assumption] is completely false as it applies to HIV".[114]

RACISM

A major challenge facing African American families is the continued and pervasive existence of racism. "...All African Americans must make psychological sense out of their disparaged condition, deflect hostility from the dominant group, and negotiate racial barriers under a wide range of circumstances."[115] African American parents deal with the challenge of teaching their children how to adapt to their environment without internalizing the negative messages. An interview participant emphasized the importance of these lessons:

> ...In the Black community you are taught that you are the descendants of kings and queens, when you go to school you are just another N___... When there is an emphasis on Black culture, you know who you are. So when you are talked down to, its okay because you know who you are and that you can make it. (Caseworker, Waller County, September 14, 1995)

Racial prejudice, such as that which maintains biased stereotypes, hinders equal access to educational, political, social, and economic resources for African Americans. When this bias is internalized by African American children, it can have devastating effects on their self-esteem.[116] "Unfortunately, African Americans are still subject to categorizations and evaluations on the basis of skin color. Because white society generally lacks knowledge of African American culture and believes many stereotypes about blacks due to limited exposure to blacks during segregation, racism and prejudice persist in American society."[117]

Race-related problems in the workplace, the educational environment, and in health care service delivery were all common concerns among the interview participants. As previously addressed, problems with race-based pay differences, and the over-representation of African American children in special

education programs are examples of the racial differences that affect these families.

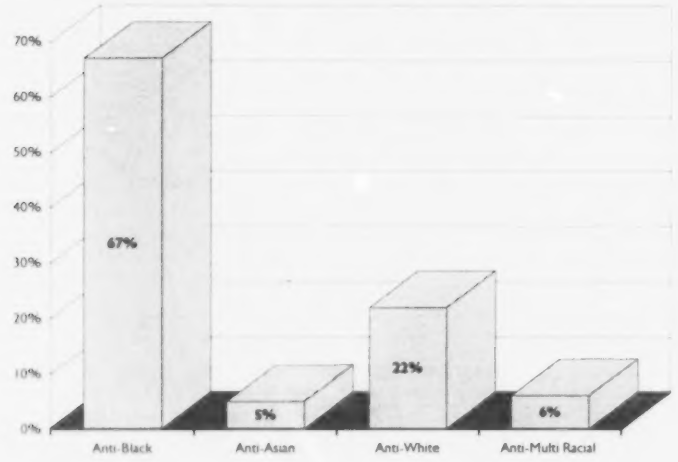
Race-Related Crime

Hate crimes represent one of the clearest forms of hostility toward African Americans and other minority groups. The Texas Department of Public Safety's 1995 annual report documented that 63.5 percent of hate crimes were racial in nature. Of all racially-based "hate crimes", 43 percent were cases where an African American was victimized on the basis of their race.[118]

> There are lots of racial issues and there has been no effort to close the gap. The feelings are typically expressed in covert ways, but there are still overt messages and crimes that occur. (Youth Service Provider, Nacogdoches, March 20,1996)

In 1995, ninety-four percent of all hate crime offenses accounted for were either aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, or vandalism.[119] Thirty percent of all hate crimes in Texas were intimidation-related, while vandalism and assault followed closely behind with 26 and 25 percent, respectively.[120]

Percent of Racially Motivated Hate Crimes in Texas, 1995



Sixty-seven percent of all hate crimes in Texas are against African Americans.

One hate crime target that has recently been in the national headlines is the African American church. Between January 1, 1995 and July 1, 1996, arson struck eleven African American churches in Texas.[121] This is the highest incidence of this type of hate crime for any state in the nation. Charitable groups, private donations, and community organizations have come together to rebuild many of these churches.

Such overt offenses against individuals and organizations in the African American community send negative messages to African Americans and their children. It is critical that African American parents instill in their children a positive self-concept and a strong ethnic identity.[122] Strong self-esteem increases the likelihood that children will successfully cope with racism-based problems as they approach adulthood. However, it is incumbent on all individuals and institutions in our society to work toward eliminating negative racial messages.

FAMILY

In the African American community, the family is one major social support network that is used to cope with economic and societal pressures. Family networks provide emotional support and guidance as the African American family struggles with socioeconomic, physical, and psychological challenges.[123] Extended families become particularly important for single parent families. The extended family can reduce stress, encourage coping behaviors, and assist in working through problems by nurturing and providing positive role models. The high rate of joblessness among the African American population and instances of racial discrimination threaten a family's ability to cope, thus increasing the family's vulnerability. The extended family functions as a survival mechanism and can reduce stress by providing financial assistance, child care and material support as well as other forms of aid, such as emotional support.[124]

> I define family as those people who care. Our definition of the parent is not just the biological; it's whoever is the next door neighbor, school teacher, aunt or uncle; whoever it is that helps in the rearing of that child... I show the family as meaning those people who have demonstrated caring through their practice. That's really the definition of family. (Program Director, Houston, September 29, 1995)

Particularly for Texas' African American children living in single parent homes, the extended family can be a critical support mechanism.

Single-Parent Families

Almost half of all African American families with children are headed by a single mother. According to the 1990 Census, 43.7 percent of all African American families with children are headed by a single mother, compared to 18.5 percent for the population as a whole.[125] These statistics have significant economic implications since single-parent households experience poverty at more than three times the rate of two-parent households, particularly when the head of the household is female. In 1990, 42.9 percent of single mother families were living in poverty while only 12.6 percent of married couple families were poor.[126] While some researchers believe the increase in single mother families is a result of a decline in the economic position of African American males, others believe that the improved position of women has reduced their need to rely on husbands.[127]

Families Headed by Single Teen Mothers

Single teenagers who give birth are among those most at-risk for living in poverty. Teenage mothers commonly experience difficulties entering the workforce due to lower education levels and limited skills.[128] These girls often

experience barriers to self-sufficiency. The additional work-related expenses of child care, clothing and transportation place strains on their finances, as they do for all low-income working parents.[129] For a single African American mother and her children, these barriers can become overwhelming.

Role Flexibility

African American family households have a strong ability to "expand or contract in response to external and internal pressures."[130] Kinship care, "a resilient, natural system of child rearing," is an example of role flexibility within the African American community.[131] Kinship care is typically exemplified through informal adoption, "a social service network that has been an integral part of the community since slavery."[132] Families informally adopt children of friends and relatives when the parent is unable to provide for their needs. In response to the rising number of children in foster care, the African American community has developed a strong network of kinship care. This role flexibility helps preserve families and gives children more opportunities within the community to get the help they need to grow up strong and healthy.

Parents as Teachers

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Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a primary prevention program which works with parents to improve the health and well-being of children. The PAT program provides education, training and support for parents through four types of interventions. Certified parent educators perform home visits to parents to discuss with the parent their child's developmental and learning stages. Parents are also invited to participate in group meetings where they can receive support from peers and hear presentations by developmental specialists. The PAT program also provides child screening for developmental delays and provides referrals as needed to services beyond the scope of the program.

Parents As Teachers programs in Texas are affiliates of the National Center for Parents As Teachers in St. Louis, Missouri. Texas services are administered statewide at 109 PAT sites. These sites work with over 6,000 families--seventy percent of the sites targeting their services toward low-income families. Teen mothers account for about 40 percent of the PAT participants and last year, 82 percent of teens participating in PAT stayed in school. The Parents as Teachers Program has been selected as a model to be replicated, and was chosen in 1992 as one site's component of its "School of the Future Project" sponsored by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, Austin, Texas. The Texas PAT programs are monitored by the Mental Health Association in Texas, which also provides training for programs throughout the state.

Fathers

Traditional accounts about the African American family have focused on the single mother family with very little attention to fathers. Many African American children, however, have fathers who live with them and care deeply about their well-being. Many African American fathers are an important and active force in their children's development.[133]

The 1990 U.S. Census shows that almost 15,000 households with children in Texas were headed by single fathers (2.2% of all households). Another 137,237 African American households with children had both mother and father present (20.4% of all households, compared to 26.4% for Anglo households and 41.6% for Hispanic households).

The responsibility of fathers not present in the home is a concern in the African American community because many fathers do not fulfill their financial responsibilities toward their children. In a survey by Massey (1991), fifty-eight percent of African American unwed mothers reported that they received only marginal financial support from the child's father.[134] However, in spite of limited financial contributions, these fathers surveyed still provide some emotional support to the family either through extended family participation in the child's life, or through direct involvement.[135]

While there is a small unemployed parents program, most TANF benefits are only available to single mothers. In Texas during 1995, only 3.2 percent of African American TANF recipients were from two-parent families.[136] Thus, an adult African American male who is unable to obtain a stable job cannot live with his family without jeopardizing their access to important social services and cash benefits. Focus group participants noted that this social service program structure contributes to the disintegration of the African American family.

> The welfare system is structured in a way that encourages males to leave home and destroy the family tradition. (Service provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Several focus group participants suggested that the TANF program should be restructured to remove penalties in order to support family formation and stability. In fact, recent changes in TANF policies have revised much of the 'marriage penalty' of previous eligibility regulations.

Male Role Models for Young African Americans

Many African American fathers become detached from their families because they are unable to support them with unstable low-income jobs. African American men have high rates of unemployment and are less likely to marry and form families than are employed men. The death and imprisonment of many young African American men also decreases the African American male presence in the community.

Interview and focus group participants discussed the importance of positive role models and consistent male figures for young African Americans.

> One of the things I think is very important and where there is a great need is for young black boys to have the concept of a rite of passage. They need to know what the expectations are and they need to have some models for how to be men and what entering manhood means. (Administrator of Health Services, September, 1995)

Interview participants believed that some young African American males have become discouraged because their primary male role models are historical heroes rather than contemporary people.

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...[Adolescents] want us to stop presenting them with strong people that are dead... As much as possible, we do need to introduce them to people who are living in the neighborhoods... that maybe aren't world famous, but are doing really good things. (Community Service Provider, Houston, September 28, 1995)

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Program/Agency: MAD DADS, INC.

Provided by: Houston Chapter

Men Against Destruction- Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder is a group of African American fathers who joined to combat gang violence and the flow of drugs into the community. These men present themselves as positive role models, and concerned loving parents who are a visible presence against the negative forces that are destroying the children, their homes, and communities. MAD DADS provide weekend street patrols, paint over graffiti, and provide positive community activities for youth. They also sponsor events such as an annual drug awareness week, gun safety classes, and gun buy-back programs. MAD DADS also commit to quarterly visits to jails and prisons to counsel and encourage youth and adults to join their mission. There is also a division of MOMS and KIDS who work with MAD DADS.

STRENGTH OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Spirituality

Religion and spirituality are vital elements in the lives of many African Americans. The spiritual lifestyle is internalized and provides a sense of empowerment and a "purpose greater than self" which assists the family in coping with many of the challenges that African Americans face.[137] A 1991 study found a positive correlation between prayer and the reduction of stress in the African American community. Outside of individual prayer, the study also found, support from church elders and other church members was the most predominately utilized form of social support.[138]

Historically, support systems fostered through religious networks were important factors in the strength of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s: "Most of [the Civil Rights Movement's] goals were accomplished under the leadership of strong, African American religious leaders of the South, who effectively mobilized the African American Community."[139] Today, the religious

community is a vital support mechanism for meeting the challenges faced by African American families.

Building Political Power on a Community Level

In individual interviews and focus groups, community members described African Americans' need for improved political power. African American politicians are needed in the community who are socially, economically and culturally connected. In order to encourage greater accountability of elected officials, focus group participants agreed that the African American community must become more informed and involved at the grass roots level.

> We need to mobilize our community at the grassroots level - street by street, block by block. (Agency Director, San Antonio, September 7, 1995)

Empowerment is the engenderment of a sense of ownership in the community. Interview participants discussed a lack of ownership that African Americans felt in their communities. They attributed the high percentage of renter households (as opposed to owner households) and the lack of available jobs within these communities to this lack of commitment to the community.

> Politically, the East side is considered Black. Economically it is not considered. There is no major anything on the East side...schools and churches and that is about it... there is no industry of any kind. No one invests in the area economically. (Service Provider, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

Creating jobs and other economic opportunities in African American neighborhoods can increase the sense of ownership and political power. Focus group participants suggested that investments in African American communities and the development of "Black-owned" businesses would increase the likelihood that African Americans would become stakeholders in the community.

In Texas, many poor, ethnic minority communities are treated as cohesive entities when in reality ethnic and cultural differences are significant. In some Texas cities, African Americans are faced with a "minority within a minority" paradigm. In these communities, there are fewer African Americans than Hispanics, resulting in the sense that African American issues are not considered.

> White males control private industry and the Hispanics control the city government. African Americans have no real position of power in the city.
> (Agency Board Member, San Antonio, September 7, 1995)

Interview participants felt that the African American community is often lumped together with other minority groups when resources are allocated, resulting in reduced attention to the specific problems of the African American people.

> ...you get the crumbs after the crumbs are taken off the table. In terms of dollars and funding, there is inequity across the board. The way grants are allocated, they are generalized in such a way that they are applicable to all. Sometimes minorities get lost in the interpretation.
> (Agency Director, San Antonio, January 18, 1996)

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The African American community can grow and prosper by forming partnerships and coalitions. Communities can learn to take advantage of the resources that are available as well as work toward bringing new resources into the community. A stronger, healthier more empowered community will lead to stronger, healthier children.

CONCLUSION

This report highlights both positive and negative aspects of the lives of African American children in Texas. These children make up 13.1 percent of the state's population under 18 years. Their well-being affects us all now and into the future. African American children are more likely to grow up in poor, single-parent households than children from other ethnic groups. The consequences of living in poverty are experienced by African American children in the quality of education they get, the type of health care they receive, and the safety of their neighborhoods. According to the community members and leaders, parents, and service providers interviewed for this report, unemployment and underemployment and race-related economic issues such as a lack of adequate employment opportunities, discriminatory hiring practices, and a dependence on social service programs, contribute to a feeling of hopelessness for many children in the African American community.

In the presence of these risk factors, African American families also possess a number of resilient features. Extended family networks are a strength of the African American community. Role flexibility and spirituality are also features of the African American family, which have allowed many families to remain strong in the face of socioeconomic challenges.

Nationally, recent figures point to improvement in trends regarding the African American community. In 1995, the rate of births to African American teens dropped 9 percent, along with the percentage of African American babies born to unwed mothers. The rate of African Americans living in poverty also fell below 30 percent, marking the first decrease in this figure since 1959 when the Census Bureau began tracking poverty.[140]

These figures are encouraging to service providers and community members. However, analysts warn that these improvements may be reversed following reforms to the welfare system and changes in the economy. When welfare recipients reach their time limit, they will attempt to enter a work force

that already cannot accommodate all the people looking for work. Meaningful welfare to work progress must assist this transition. It will continue to be imperative that a safety net of government programs is maintained to prevent even more children from falling into poverty.

The problems and concerns seen in the African American community are interrelated and complex. This complexity can perhaps explain why these problems persist in spite of individual achievement and excellent programs in place across the state to address continuing needs. There is no simple solution that will improve the well-being of these children. Rather, a multi-faceted approach involving community partnerships between all the relevant players at the community, state, and federal levels is necessary. Too many African American children are born into families already facing disparate challenges and risks. A commitment from us all is needed to give each of them an equitable start in this abundant society.

> When people talk about setting a new course for children and creating this new surge of rebuilding the family, I always try to help them be very realistic and look at it from a slavery point of view. Slavery was a situation where we were prisoners of war, to a point, and where families deteriorated... It took us 400 years to get us to this point... we must at least invest that much time in rebuilding families. (Agency Director, Houston, September 27, 1995)

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The following policy recommendations are a sampling of suggestions drawn from the comments of community members interviewed for this research as well as from current related literature.

Economic Status

- Work to equalize salaries across race, ethnicity, or gender. For instance, develop pay schedules that are based on education and experience, not age, race, ethnicity, and gender.
- Provide financial support and incentives for African American entrepreneurs who wish to initiate businesses within the African American community.
- Allocate more funds to job training programs. Increase the relevance of the training programs, based on workforce trends and the economic needs of the immediate community. Improve the quality of the programs, so that graduates may be successful in the job market.
- Institute transitional programs, job training and job placement, for AFDC-(now TANF) supported mothers who are moving away from welfare dependency to self-support.
- Eliminate discriminatory housing practices by enforcing the fair housing act strategies.
- Provide home management skills training for families transitioning out of substandard housing.
- Insure that service providers are sensitive to the ethnic and cultural strengths of African Americans which may allow them a unique perspective in combating poverty.

Education

- Provide technical and comprehensive training programs for youth.
- Provide alternative employment opportunities for students who drop out of school.
- Eliminate barriers caused by economic conditions or geographic region (e.g., transportation).
- Distribute funds to schools based on need.
- Encourage quality educational service delivery (teachers with comparable qualifications and experience at all schools).
- Develop statewide standards for addressing cultural diversity and sensitivity in schools.
- Hire staff that reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the students.
- Incorporate cultural diversity training into the teacher certification process.
- Implement programs to increase parents' participation in school activities and promote communication between parents and school.
- Create a safety net for children by providing activities for every age group and grade level.
- Provide a mentor for each child to ensure emotional and educational support in the school environment.

Health

- Emphasize preventive care in health care service delivery. Make prevention the "big ticket item" in the allocation of funds.
- Consolidate service delivery programs. Provide "sick" and "well" care under the same roof.
- Identify at-risk children through community outreach.
- Ensure that health care providers accept Medicaid patients and others without private insurance.
- Implement school curricula that focus on education and prevention of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.
- Integrate strong alcohol and drug use/abuse prevention programs into schools.
- Address access-related issues for all areas by developing community-based programs and eliminating barriers to access in existing programs. Utilize transportation services and home visits by doctors and/or nurse practitioners.
- Place funding dollars in the Health Professional Shortage Areas and offer incentives for serving traditionally underserved communities.
- Improve access to services by educating people about transportation options.

ENDNOTES

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[2] National Center for Children in Poverty. *One in Four*, 1996 Columbia School of Public Health.

[3] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1996). *Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore, MD.

[4] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1996). *Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore, MD.

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[14] *The Poverty Despite Work Handbook*, presented at the New Welfare Law Conference and Funding State Services Conference, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. November 15-18, 1996. Note: Anglo American and African American figures refer to non-Hispanic Anglos and non-Hispanic African Americans.

[15] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1996). *Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore, MD.

[16] Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1996). *Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore, MD.

[17] National Research Council. (1993). *Losing Generations: Adolescents in High-risk Settings*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

[18] National Research Council. (1993). *Losing Generations: Adolescents in High-risk Settings*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

[19] Gardner, J.M. (1992). Working and poor in 1990. *Monthly Labor Review, 115* (12), 20-28.

[20] U.S. Census, 1990. The official U.S. poverty guidelines in 1990 stated that, for example, a family of four was in poverty if their income was $12,675 or less.

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